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THE
CHRONIC LOAFER

BY
NELSON LLOYD

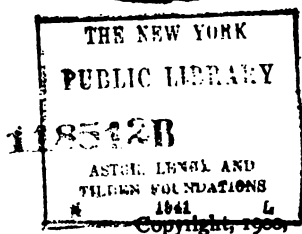
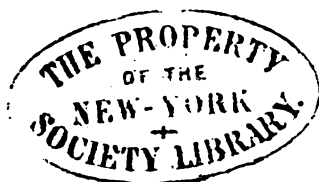


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By

J. F. TAYLOR & COMPANY.

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THE CHRONIC LOAFER.

CHAPTER I.

The Reunion.

IN the center of one of the most picturesque valleys in the heart of Pennsylvania lies the village and at one end of its single street stands the store. On the broad porch of this homely and ancient edifice there is a long oak bench, rough, and hacked in countless places by the knives of many generations of loungers. From this bench, looking northward across an expanse of meadows, a view is had of a low, green ridge, dotted here and there with white farm buildings. Behind that rise the mountains, along whose sides on bright days play the fanciful shadows of the clouds. Close by the store is the rumbling mill, and beyond it runs the creek, spanned by a wooden bridge whose planking now and then resounds with the beat of horses' hoofs, so that it adds its music to the roar of the mill-wheels and

ring of the anvil in the blacksmith shop across the stream.

One July day the stage rattled over the bridge, past the mill and drew up at the store. The G. A. R. Man, the only passenger, climbed out of the lumbering vehicle, dragging after him a shapeless, battered carpet-bag. He limped up the steps in the wake of the driver, who was helping the Storekeeper with the mail-pouch, and when on the porch stopped and nodded a greeting to the men who were sitting on the bench kicking their heels together—the Patriarch, the School Teacher, the Miller, the Tinsmith and the Chronic Loafer. The loungers gazed solemnly at the new arrival; at his broad-brimmed, black slouch hat, which though drawn down over his left temple did not hide the end of a band of court-plaster; at his blue coat, two of its brass buttons missing; at his trousers, in which there were several rents that had been clumsily sewed together.

The silence was broken by the School Teacher, who remarked with a contemptuous curl of the nose, "So you've got home from Gettysburg, have you? From your appearance one would judge that you had come from a battle instead of a reunion."

"Huh! A good un—a good un!"

All eyes were turned toward the end of the bench, where sat the Chronic Loafer. He was a tall, thin, loose-jointed man. Thick, untrimmed

locks of tawny hair fell from beneath his ragged, straw hat, framing a face whose most prominent features were a pair of deep-set, dull blue eyes, two sharp, protruding cheek-bones and a week's growth of red beard. His attire was simple in the extreme. It consisted of a blue striped, hickory shirt, at the neck-band of which glistened a large, white china button, which buttoned nothing, but served solely as an ornament, since no collar had ever embraced the thin, brown neck above it. A piece of heavy twine running over the left shoulder and down across the chest supported a pair of faded, brown overalls, which were adorned at the right knee by a large patch of white cotton. He was sitting in a heap. His head seemed to join his body somewhere in the region of his heart. His bare left foot rested on his right knee and his left knee was encircled by his long arms.

"A good un!" he cried again.

Then he suddenly uncoiled himself, throwing back his head until it struck the wall behind him, and swung his legs wildly to and fro.

"Well, what air you so tickled about now?" growled the G. A. R. Man.

"I was jest a-thinkin' that you'd never come outen no battle lookin' like that," drawled the Loafer.

He nudged the Miller with his elbow and winked at the Teacher. Forthwith the three broke into loud fits of laughter.

The Patriarch pounded his hickory stick vigorously on the floor, pulled his heavy platinum rimmed spectacles down to the tip of his nose and over their tops gazed in stern disapproval.

"Boys, boys," he said, "no joshing. It ain't right to josh."

"True—true," said the Loafer. He had wrapped himself up again and was in repose. "My pap allus use to say, 'A leetle joshin' now an' then is relished be the wisest men—that is, ef they hain't the fellys what's bein' joshed.'"

The G. A. R. Man had been leaning uneasily against a pillar. On this amicable speech from his chief tormenter, the frown that had been playing over his face gave way to a broad grin, three white teeth glistening in the open space between his stubby mustache and beard.

"Yes," he said, "I hev come home afore my 'scurion ticket expired." He removed his hat and disclosed a great patch of plaster on his forehead. "Ye see Gettysburg was a sight hotter fer me yesterday than in '63. But I've got to the eend o' my story."

"So that same old yarn you've ben tellin' at every camp-fire sence the war is finished at last. That's a blessin'!" cried the Miller.

"I never knowd you was in the war. I thot you jest drawed a pension," interrupted the Loafer.

The veteran did not heed these jibes but fixed

himself comfortably on the upturned end of his carpet-bag.

"Teacher, I've never seen you at any of our camp-fires," he began. "Consekently the eend o' my story won't do you no good 'less you knows the first part. So I'll tell you 'bout my experience at the battle o' Gettysburg an' then explain my second fight there. I was in the war bespite the insinooations o' them ez was settin' on that same bench in the day o' the nation's danger. I served as a corporal in the Two-hundred-and-ninety-fifth Pennsylvany Wolunteers an' was honorable discharged in '63."

"Fer which discharge he gits his pension," the Loafer ventured.

"That ain't so. I cot malary an' several other complaints in the Wilterness that henders me workin' steady. It was no wonder, either, fer our retchment was allus fightin'. We was knowd ez the Bloody Pennsylvany retchment, fer we'd ben in every battle from Bull Run on, an' hed had some wery desp'rate engagements. 'Henever they was any chargin' to be done, we done it; ef they was a fylorn hope, we was on it; ef they was a breastwork to be tuk, we tuk it. You uns can imagine that be the eend o' two years sech work, we was pretty bad cut up. 'Hen the army chased the rebels up inter this state we was with it, but afore the fight at Gettysburg it was concided that sence they wasn't many of us, we'd better be

put to guardin' baggage wagons. That was a kind o' work that didn't take many men, but required fighters in caset the enemy give the boys in front a slip an' sneaked een on our rear."

The School Teacher coughed learnedly and raised a hand to indicate that he had something to say. Having secured the floor, he began: "When Darius the First invaded Europe he had so many women, children and baggage wagons in his train that——"

"See here," cried the Patriarch, testily, "Dar'us was afore my time, I allow. We don't care two snaps o' a ram's tail 'bout Dar'us. We wants to know 'bout them bloody Pennsylvanians."

The pedagogue shook his head in condemnation of the ignorance of his companions, but allowed the G. A. R. Man to proceed.

"Durin' the first day's engagement our retchment, with a couple of others, an' the trains, was 'bout three mile ahint Cemetary Hill, but on the next mornin' we was ordered back twenty mile. It was hard to hev to drive off inter the country 'hen the boys was hevin' it hot bangin' away at the enemy, but them was orders, an' a soldier allus obeys orders.

"The fightin' begin airly that day. We got the wagons a-goin' afore sun-up, but it wasn't long tell we could hear the roar o' the guns, an' see the smoke risin' in clouds an' then settlin'

down over the country. We felt pretty blue, too, ez we went trampin' along, fer the wounded an' stragglers was faster 'an we. They'd come hobblin' up with bad news, sayin' how the boys was bein' cut up along the Emmettsburg road, an' how we'd better move faster, ez the army was losin' an' the rebels 'ud soon be een on us. Then they'd hobble away agin. Them wasn't our only troubles, either. The mules was behavin' mean an' cuttin' up capers, an' the wagons was breakin' down. Then we hed to be continual watchin' fer them Confederate cavalry we was expectin' was a-goin' to pounce down on us.

"Evenin' come, an' we lay to fer the night. The fires was started, an' the coffee set a-boilin', an' we had a chancet to rest a while. The wounded an' the stragglers that jest filled the country kep' comin' in all the time, sometim's alone, sometim's in twos an' threes, some with their arms tied up in all sorts o' queer ways, or hobblin' on sticks, or with their heads bandaged; about the miserablest lot o' men I ever see. The noise of the fight stopped, an' everything was quiet an' peaceful like nawthin' hed ben happenin'. The quiet an' the dark an' the fear we was goin' to meet the enemy at any minute made it mighty onpleasant, an' what with the stories them wounded fellys give us, we didn't rest wery easy.

"I went out on the picket line at ten o'clock.

Seemed I hedn't ben there an hour tell I made out the dark figure of a man comin' th'oo the fiel's wery slow like. Me an' the fellys with me watched sharp. Sudden the man stopped, hesitated like an' sank down in a heap. Then he picked himself up an' come staggerin' on. He couldn't 'a' ben more'n fifty yards away 'hen he th'owed up his hands an' pitched for'a'd on his face. Me an' me buddy run out an' carried him inter the fire. But it wasn't no uset. He was dead.

"They was a bullet wound in his shoulder, an' his clothes was soaked with blood that hed ben drippin', drippin' tell he fell the last time. I opened his coat, an' in his pocket foun' a letter, stamped, an' directed apparent to his wife—that was all to tell who he was. So I went back to me post thinkin' no more of it an' never noticin' that that man's coat 'ud 'a' fit two of him.

"Mornin' come, an' the firin' begin over toward Gettysburg. We could see the smoke risin' agin an' hear the big guns bellerin' tell the ground beneath our feet seemed to swing up an' down. I tell you uns that was a grand scene. We was awful excited, fer we knowd the first two days hed gone agin us, an' more an' more stragglers an' wounded come limpin' back, all with bad news. I was gittin' nervous, thinkin' an' thinkin' over it, an' wishin' I was where the fun was.

Then I concided mebbe I wasn't so bad off, fer I might 'a' been killed like the poor felly I seen the night before, an' in thinkin' o' the man I remembered the letter an' got it out. I didn't 'tend to open it, but final I thot it wasn't safe to go mail-in' letters 'thout knowin' jest what was in 'em, so I read it.

"The letter was wrote on a piece o' wrappin' paper in an awful bad handwrite, but 'hen I got th'oo it I set plumb down an' cried like a chil'. It was from John Parker to his wife Mary, livin' somewhere out in western Pennsylvany. He begin be mentionin' how we was on the eve of a big fight an' how he 'tended to do his duty even ef it come to fallin' at his post. It was hard, he sayd, but he knowd she'd ruther hev no husban' than a coward. He was allus thinkin' o' her an' the baby he'd never seen, but felt satisfaction in knowin' they was well fixed. It was sorrerful, he continyerd, that she was like to be a widdy so young, an' he wasn't goin' to be mean about it. He allus knowd, he sayd, how she'd hed a hanker-in' after young Silas Quincy 'fore she tuk him. Ef he fell, he thot she'd better merry Silas 'hen she'd recovered from the 'fects o' his goin'. He ended up with a lot o' last 'good-bys' an' talk about duty to his country.

"Right then an' there I set down an' wrote that poor woman a few lines tellin' how I'd foun' the letter in her dead husban's pocket. I was

goin' to quit at that, but I concided it 'ud be nice to add somethin' consolin', so I told how we'd foun' him on the fiel' o' battle, face to the enemy, an' how his last words was fer her an' the baby. That day we won the fight, an' the next I mailed Mrs. Parker her letter. It seemed about the plum blamedest, saddest thing I ever hed to do with."

"I've allus ben cur'ous 'bout that widdy, too," the Chronic Loafer remarked.

The Teacher cleared his throat and recited :

"Now night her course began, and over heaven
Inducing darkness grateful truce imposed,
And silence on the odious din of war ;
Under her cloud——"

"No poetry jist yet, Teacher," said the veteran.
"Wait tell you hear the sekal o' the story."

"Yes, let's hev somethin' new," growled the Miller.

Having silenced the pedagogue, the G. A. R. Man resumed his narrative.

"I never heard no more o' Widdy Parker tell last night, an' then it come most sudden. Our retchment hed a reunion on the fiel' this year, you know, an' on Monday I went back to Gettysburg fer the first time sence I was honorable discharged. The boys was all there, what's left o' 'em, an' we jest hed a splendid time wisitin' the monyments an' talkin' over the days back in '63.

There was my old tentmate, Sam Thomas, on one leg, an' Jim Luckenbach, who was near tuk be yaller janders afore Petersburg. There was the colonel, growed old an' near blind, an' our captain an' a hundred odd others.

"Well, last night we was a lot of us a-settin' in the hotel tellin' stories. It come my turn an' I told about the dead soldier's letter. A big felly in a unyform hed ben leanin' agin the bar watchin' us. 'Hen I begin he pricked up his ears a leetle. Ez I got funder an' funder he seemed to git more an' more interested, I noticed. By an' by I seen he was becomin' red an' oneasy, an' final 'hen I'd finished he walks acrosst the room to where we was settin' an' stands there starin' at me, never sayin' nawthin'.

"A minute passed. I sais, sais I, 'Well, comrade, what air you starin' so fer?'

"Sais he, 'That letter was fer Mary Parker?'

"'True,' sais I, surprised.

"'Dead sure?' sais he.

"'Sure,' sais I.

"Then he shakes his fist an' yells, 'I've 'tended most every reunion here sence the war hopin' to meet the idjet that sent that letter to my wife an' wrote that foolishness 'bout findin' my dead body. After twenty-five years I've foun' you!'

"He pulls off his coat. The boys all jumps up.

"I, half skeert to death, cries, 'But you ain't the dead man!'

"'Dead,' he yells. 'Never ben near it. Nor did I 'tend to hev every blame fool in the army mailin' my letters nuther. Because you finds a man with my coat on, that hain't no reason he's me. I was gittin' to the rear with orders ez lively ez a cricket an' th'owed off that coat jest because it was warm runnin'.'

"'Hen I seen what I'd done I grabs his arm, I was so excited, an' cries, 'Did she marry Silas Quincy?'

"'It wasn't your fault she didn't,' he sais, deliberate like, rollin' up his sleeves. 'I got home two days after the letter an' stopped the weddin' party on their way to church.'"

CHAPTER II.

The Spelling Bee.

THE Chronic Loafer stretched his legs along the counter and rested his back comfortably against a pile of calicoes.

"I allus held," he said, "that they hain't no sech things ez a roarinborinallus. I know some sais they is 'lectric lights, but 'hen I seen that big un last night I sayd to my Missus, an' I hol' I'm right, I sayd that it was nawthin' but the iron furnaces over the mo'ntain. Fer s'pose, ez the Teacher claims, they was lights at the North Pole—does you uns believe we could see 'em all that distance? Well now!"

He gazed impressively about the store. The Patriarch, the Miller and the G. A. R. Man were disposed to agree with him. The School Teacher was sarcastic.

"Where ignorance is bliss 'twere folly to be wise," he said. He tilted back on two legs of his chair and adjusted his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat, so that all eight of his long quiver-

ing fingers seemed to be pointing in scorn at the man on the counter.

The Loafer rolled slowly over on one side and eyed the pedagogue.

"Ben readin' the almanick lately, hain't ye?" he drawled.

"If you devoted less time to the almanac and more to physical geography," retorted the Teacher, "you'd know that the Aurora Borealis hain't a light made on *terra firma* but that it is a peculiar magnetic condition of the atmosphere. And the manner in which you pronounce it is exceedingly ludicrous. It's not a roarinborinallus. It is spelled *A-u-r-o-r-a B-o-r-e-a-l-i-s*."

The Loafer sat up, crossed his legs and embraced his knee, thus forming a natural fortification behind which he could collect his thoughts before hurling them at his glib and smiling foe. He gazed dully at his rival a moment; then said suddenly, "My pap was a cute man."

"He hasn't left any living monument to his good sense," said the Teacher.

The Loafer looked at the Storekeeper, who was sitting beneath him on an empty egg-crate. "Do you mind how he use to say that Solerman meant 'teacher' 'hen he sayd 'wine'; how Solerman meant, 'Look not upon the teacher 'hen he is read,' fer a leetle learnin' leaveneth the whole lump an' puffs him up so——"

The pedagogue's chair came down on all four

legs with a crash. His right thumb left the seclusion of his waistcoat, his right arm shot out straight, and a trembling forefinger pointed at the eyes that were just visible over the top of the white-patched knee.

"See here!" he shouted. "I'm ready for an argyment, but no callin' names. This is no place for abuse."

The Loafer resumed his reclining attitude and fixed his gaze on the dim recesses of the ceiling.

"I hain't callin' no one names," he said slowly, "I was jest tellin' what my pap use to say."

"Tut-tut-tut, boys," interrupted the Patriarch, thumping the floor with his stick. "Don't git quarrelin' over sech a leetle thing ez the meanin' o' a word. Mebbe ye's both right."

The Tinsmith had hitherto occupied a nail keg near the stove, unnoticed. Now he began to rub his hands together gleefully and to chuckle. The Teacher was convinced that his own discomfiture was the cause of the other's mirth.

"Well, what are you so tickled about?" he snapped.

"Aurory Borealis. Perry Muthersbaugh spelled down Jawhn Jimson on that very word. Yes, he done it on that very word. My, but that there was a bee, Perfessor!"

"Now 'fore you git grindin' away, sence you've got on spellin'," said the Chroni^{er} I^{er}, "I want to tell a good un——"

"Let him tell us about Perry Muthersbaugh," said the Teacher in decisive tones. The title "professor" had had a softening effect, and he repaid the compliment by supporting the Tinsmith's claim to the floor.

Compelled to silence, the Chronic Loafer closed his eyes as though oblivious to all about him, but a hand stole to his ear and formed a trumpet there to aid his hearing.

"Some folks is nat'ral spellers jest ez others is nat'ral musicians," began the Tinsmith. "Agin, it's jest ez hard to make a good speller be education ez it is to make a good bass-horn player, fer a felly that hain't the inborn idee o' how many letters is needed to make a word'll never spell no better than the man that hain't the nat'ral sense o' how much wind's needed to make a note, 'll play the bass-horn."

"I cannot wholly agree with you," the Teacher interrupted. "Give a child first words of one syllable, then two; drill him in words ending in *t-i-o-n* until——"

"We won't discuss that, Perfessor. It don't affect our case, fer Jawhn Jimson was a nat'ral speller. You never seen the like. Give him a word o' six or seven syllables an' he'd spell it out like it was on a blackboard right before him. 'Hen he was twenty he'd downed all the scholars in Happy Grove an' won about six bees. Then he went to Pikestown Normal School, an' 'hen he

come back you never knowd the beat. He hed stodied Lating an' algebray there, but I guesst he must also 'a' spent considerable time a-brushin' up his spellin', fer they was only one felly 'bout these parts could keep with him any time at all. He was my frien' Perry Muthersbaugh, who tot up to Kishikoquillas.

"You uns mind the winter we hed the big blizzard, 'hen the snow covered all the fences an' was piled so high in the roads that we hed to drive th'oo the fiel's. They was a heap sight goin' on that year—church sosh'bles, singin' school an' spellin' bees. Me an' Perry Muthersbaugh was buddies, an' not a week passed 'thout we went some'eres together. Fore I knowd it him an' Jawhn Jimson was keepin' company with Hannah Ciders. She was jest ez pretty ez a peach, plump an rosy, with the slickest nat'ral hair an' teeth you uns ever seen. She was fond o' edication, too, so 'hen them teachers was after her she couldn't make up her min'. She favored both. Perry was good lookin' an' steady an' no fool. He'd set all evenin' along side o' her an' never say nawthin' much, but she kind o' thot him good company. It allus seemed to me that Jimson was a bit conceity an' bigitive, but he was amusin' an' hed the advantage of a normal school edication. He kind o' dazzled her. She didn't know which of 'em to take, an' figured on it tell well inter the winter. Her color begin to go an' she was gittin'

thin. Perry an' Jawhn was near wild with anxiousness an' was continual quarrelin'. Then what d'ye s'pose they done?"

"It'll take a long time fer 'em to do much the way you tells it," the Chronic Loafer grumbled.

"She give out," continued the Tinsmith, not heeding the interruption, "that she'd take the best edicated. That tickled Jawhn, an' he blowed around to his frien's how he was goin' to send 'em invites to his weddin'. Perry jest grit his teeth an' sayd nawthin' 'cept that he was ready. Then he got out his spellin' book an' went to sawin' wood jest ez hard an' fast ez he could."

"That there reminds me o' my pap." The Chronic Loafer was sitting up again.

"Well, if your pap was anything like his son," said the Teacher, "I guess he could 'a' sawed most of his wood with a spellin' book."

The author of this witticism laughed long and loud, having support in the Miller and the G. A. R. Man. The Patriarch put his hand under his chin and dexterously turned his long beard upward so that it hid his face. In the seclusion thus formed he had a quiet chuckle all to himself, for he was a politic old person and loath to offend.

"Boys, boys," he said when the mirth was subsiding, "remember what the Scriptur' sais——"

"Pap didn't git it from the Scriptur'," said the Loafer complacently. "He use to give it ez a text tho', somethin' like this, 'He that goeth at

the wood-pile too fast gen'rally breaketh his saw on the fust nail an' freezeth all winter.' "

" Not ef he gits the right kind o' firewood—the kind that hasn't no nails," said the Miller hotly.

" Huh ! " exclaimed the Loafer, and he sprawled out upon the counter once more.

The Tinsmith took up the narrative again.

" It was agreed that the two teachers 'ud hev it out at the big spellin' bee 'tween their schools the follyin' week. The night set come. Sech a crowd ez gathered at the Happy Grove school house ! They was sleighin', an' fer a quarter of a mile in front o' the buildin' they was nawthin' but horses hitched to the fences. The room was decorated with greens an' lighted with ile lamps fer the occasion, an' was jest packed. All the seats was filled with girls. The men was lined three deep along the walls an' banked up on top of one another at the back. On one side o' the platform, settin' on a long bench under the black-board, was the sixteen best scholars o' Happy Grove school led be Jawhn Jimson. He was smilin' an' conferdent, an' gazed longin' at Hannah Ciders, who was on one o' the front seats an' 'peared rather nervous.

" Perry Muthersbaugh come up to me ez I was standin' be the stove warmin' up, an' I whispered him a few words of encouragement, tho' I felt sorry fer him. He was a leetle excited but 'lowed it 'ud come out all right. Then he tuk his place

on the other side o' the platform with his sixteen scholars, an' the proceedin's begin.

"Teacher Long from Lemon township give out the words, while me an' another felly kep' tally. The first word was soupeny. Perry missed it. He spelled it *s-u-p-e-n-a*. It jest made me sick to hev to mark down one agin his side. Jimson tuk it, spelled it all right, an' commenced to smile. Muthersbaugh looked solemn. The next felly on his side spelled supersedes correct, while the girl beside Jawhn missed superannuation. Happy Grove and Kishikoquillas was even.

"I tell you uns it was most excitin' to see them trained spellers battlin'. They kep' it up fer half an 'nour, an' 'hen they quit Happy Grove hed two misses less than Kishikoquillas. Jimson was smilin' triumphant. Perry didn't do nawthin' but set there quiet like.

"Then come the final test—the spellin' down. After a recess o' ten minutes the sides lined up agin, an' 'henever one missed a word he hed to go sit in the aud'ence. They spelled an' spelled tell they was no one left but Jawhn Jimson an' Perry Muthersbaugh, standin' glarin' at each other an' singin' out letters. It was a grand sight. Hannah Ciders was pale an' tremblin', fer she knowd the valley of an idle word then. The aud'ence was most stretchin' their necks outen joint they was so interested. Two lamps went out an' no one fixed them. The air was blue with steam made be the

snow meltin' offen the fellys' boots, the stove begin to smoke, an' the room was suffocatin', yit no one thot to put up a winder, the excitemen' was so bad.

"Sech words ez penultimate, concatenation, pentateuch an' silhouette come dead easy to them teachers. They kep' glarin' at each other an' spellin' like their life depended on it. Poor Long's voice got weaker an' weaker givin' out words, an' I was that nervous I could hairdly see. They spelled all the *ations* an' *entions*, all the words endin' in *is-m*, *d-le* an' *ness*, tell it seemed they'd use up the book. Perry was gittin' more excited. Jimson's knees was tremblin' visible.

"Then Rorybory Allus was give out. You could 'a' heard a pin drop in that room. Jimson he begin slow, ez ef it was dead easy: '*A-r-o-r-a*, Aurora; *b-o-r*, Aurora Bor; *e-a-l-i-s*, Aurora Borealis.'

"A mumble went over the room. He seen he was wrong an' yelled, '*A-u*, I mean!'

"'Too late,' sais Long. 'Only one chancet at a time. The gentleman who gits it right first, wins.'

"Jawhn was white ez a sheet, an' his face an' han's was twitchin' ez he stood there glarin' at Perry. Muthersbaugh looked at the floor like he was stedyin'. I seen Hannah Ciders lean for'a'd an' grip the desk with her han's. Then I knowd she'd made up her min' which she favored.

"He begin, '*A-u*, au ; *r-o-r*, ror, Auror ; *a*, Aurora ; *B-o-r-e*, bore, Aurora Bore ; *a-l*, al, Aurora Boreal—' Then he stopped, an' looked up at the ceilin', an' stodied.

"I seen tears in Hannah Ciders' eyes ez she leaned for'a'd, not breathin'. I seen Jimson grin, an' knowd he remembered he'd left out the *u* an' 'ud spell it jest ez quick ez he got a chancet. I believed Perry was goin' to say *a*, that it was all up with him an' that Hannah Ciders knowd too late who she favored.

"All o' a sudden the door flew open an' they was a cry : 'Hoss thief ! thieves ! Some un's run off with Teacher Jimson's sleigh.'

"You uns never seen sech a panic. The weemen jumped up an' yelled. The men all piled outen the door. Jawhn Jimson climbed th'oo the winder, an' Teacher Long dropped his spellin' book an' followed. To my surprise Perry Muthersbaugh never moved. He jest stood there lookin' at Hannah Ciders an' smilin' while she gazed back. I was gittin' outen the winder among the last an' turned to see ef Perry was ahint me—that's how I noticed it. Fer three minutes them two stared at each other an' I stared at them, not knowin' what to make of it. Meantime the room was cleared. Outside we heard the sleighbells ringin' ez the boys started off after the thieves ; we heard Jawhn Jimson an' Teacher Long callin' to 'em to go in this an' that direction ; we heard

the weemen complainin' because so many'd hev to walk home.

"Jest then the rear winder, right back o' where Perry was standin', slid up an' his young brother Sam stuck in his head. He looked 'round, an' he seen the coast was clear. Then he whispered, 'I give that 'larm in time, Perry, didn't I? Teacher Jimson's horse is hitched right here ahint the school-house, an' you can take her home jest ez soon ez the last o' these fools gits away.'

"Perry wheeled round an' run at the youngster, ketchin' him be the collar an' draggin' him inter the room.

" 'What you mean,' sais he, shakin' him like a rat. 'What you mean be spoilin' the bee?'

"Sam begin to yowl. 'I seen ye was stuck,' he sais, 'an' I thot I'd help ye out.'

"With that Perry th'owed his brother off into a corner o' the room. Then he stood up straight an' looked Hannah Ciders right in the eye.

" 'He thot I was stuck,' he sayd, steppin' off the platform an' walkin' up to the girl. 'But I ain't. The last syllable's *e-a-l-a-s*!'

" 'No,' she answers quiet like. 'It's *e-a-l-i-s*—but that ain't no difference.' "

CHAPTER III.

Absalom Bunkel.

THE Patriarch flattened his nose against the grimy windowpane and peered out into the storm.

"Mighty souls!" he cried. "Jest look at it a-comin' down! Hed I a-knowd we was goin' to hev it like this, you'd 'a' seen me a-leavin' home—you'd 'a' seen me a-leavin' home."

The old man thoughtfully stroked his beard. He felt that he had met but just retribution for coming to the store to loaf. When an hour before he had awakened from a doze in his armchair, picked up his stick and hobbled to the village, the sky was clear and blue; not a cloud was visible anywhere, and the sun was blazing down on the fields of yellow grain that he overlooked from the porch of his little house on the hill. But the storm had been gathering its force unseen behind the neighboring mountains, piling black cloud on black cloud. And then, like an army charging on a sleeping enemy, it swept forth from its hiding-

place, amid the flash of lightning and the crash of thunder, and deluged the valley.

"My, oh, my!" muttered the old man. "It serves me right. I ought to 'a' knowd better. 'Henever I runs down here fer a minute's loaf, it rains; never a team comes 'long to give me a lift home, an' I hes to paddle back in me leaky ole boots."

He hobbled to his chair by the empty stove, about which were gathered the men of the village, despite the fact that no fire blazed within and the cold weather was far ahead.

"I hope the company ain't displeasin'," drawled the Chronic Loafer. He knocked the ashes out of his pipe, refilled and lighted it, and sprawled out upon the counter.

"Not at all—at all. It's the loafin' I hate. I never could loaf jest right," replied the Patriarch, glancing at the prostrate form.

The Loafer gave no answer save a faint "Huh!"

"Jest because a felly sets 'round the stove hain't no sign he's lazy, Grandpap," said the Miller with warmth.

"Fur be it from me from sayin' so, boys—fur be it," said the old man. "But ez I was sayin' a while ago, I don't want to git inter no sech habits ez Absalom Bunkel."

"Ab'slom Bunkel—Bunkel—Bunkel?" repeated the Tinsmith, punctuating his remark with puffs of tobacco smoke.

"Bunkel—Bunkel?" said the Storekeeper inquiringly, tapping the end of his nose with his pencil.

"Who's Abs'lom Bunkel?" the Loafer cried.

"Absalom Bunkel was a man ez was nat'rally so lazy it was a credit to him every time he moved," the Patriarch began. He fixed his stick firmly on the floor, piled his two fat hands on its big knob head, and leaned forward until his chin almost rested on his knuckles. "You uns knows the old lawg house that stands where the Big Run crosses the road over the mo'ntain. It's all tumbled down now. They ain't no daubin' atween the lawgs; the chimbley's fallen, the fence is gone, an' the lot's choked up with weeds. It's a forlorn place to-day, but 'hen I was a lad it was jest about the slickest thing along the ridge yander. That's where Absalom Bunkel lived, an' his pap, an' his pap's pap lived afore him. Ezry Bunkel was a mean man, an' he come nat'ral by his meanness, fer they never was one o' the name who was knowed to buy anything he could borry or give away anything he could sell. So 'hen he died he left Absalom a neat little pile o' about nine hundred dollars. An' a fortunate thing it was fer the son, fer he'd ruther by fur set on the porch with the pangs o' hunger gnawin' th'oo him, a-listenin' to the birds an' watchin' the bees a-hummin' over the sunflowers, than to 'a' worked.

"Now Absalom was afore my time, an' I never

seen him myself, but I've heard tell of him from my pap, an' what my pap sayd was allus true—true ez gawspel it was. He otter 'a' knowd all about it, too, fer he was a pall-bearer at Ezry's funeral. Absalom was thirty-five year old 'hen that happened. He didn't go off spendin' his fortune—not much. He jest set right down in a rockin' chair on the front porch an' let his sister Nancy look after the place. Nance done the farmin'; Nance made the garden; Nance milked the cow; Nance done the housework an' come to the store. He done nawthin'—absolute nawthin'.

“He was never out o' bed afore sun-up. Ef it was warm he'd set on the leetle porch all day lookin' over the walley, watchin' the folks goin' by an' the birds swoopin' th'oo the fiel's, an' listenin' to the dreamy hum o' nature. Ef it was cold he'd loaf all day be the fireplace, bakin' his shins. Sometim's Nance 'ud go away fer a spell an' fergit to leave him wood. Does he cut some fer himself like an ordinary man? Not him. He jest walks to the nearest possible fence-rail, kerry's it inter the house, puts one eend inter the fire an' keeps pushin' een ez it burns off. That's the kind o' a felly Absalom Bunkel was.

“Now it happened that 'hen he'd been livin' this way tell his forty-fifth year ole Andy Crimmel tuk a placet about a miled beyant his. One nice afternoon ez Absalom set a-dozin' on the porch, Andy's dotter, Annie May, come trippin'

down the road on her way to the store, lookin' pretty ez a pictur in her red sunbonnet, swingin' a basket an' singin' a melancholy piece. Absalom woke with a start an' rubbed his heavy eyes. He got sight of her pink cheeks afore she ducked under her bonnet, fer 'hen she seen him she sudden stopped her singin' an' walked by a-lookin' over the walley. That one glance done Absalom Bunkel. He stayed awake tell she come back.

"That night he didn't eat no supper.

"'Nance,' sais he to his sister, 'how fur is it to Crimmel's?'

"'Nigh onter a miled,' sais she.

"An' he jest groaned, drawed his boots, tuk a candle an' went up to bed.

"Twicet a week all that summer Annie May Crimmel come a-singin' down the road. An' Absalom, dozin' on the porch, 'ud hear her voice tell she'd reach the edge o' the woods. There she'd stop her song an' go ploddin' by, gazin' over the walley like he wasn't about or wasn't wuth lookin' at. Absalom kept gittin' fatter an' fatter from doin' nawthin', an' it seemed to him like Annie May Crimmel was prettier every time she went to store. He was onrastless. He was onhappy. He knowd what was wrong, an' he seen no cure, fer to him that girl walkin' 'long the road not twenty rods from his house was like a bit o' bread danglin' jest beyant the reach o' a starvin' man.

"Perhaps you uns wonders why he didn't go down an' speak to her. That wasn't Absalom's way. He might 'a' walked that fur to git warm. But to speak to a girl? Never.

"Oncet he called to her, but she paid no attention, an' hung her head bashful like, an' walked on the faster.

" 'Nance,' sais he to his sister that night at supper, 'I've kind o' a notion fer Annie May Crimmel,' he sais.

" 'Hev you?' sais she, lookin' surprised, tho' of course she knowd it an' fer weeks hed ben wonderin' what 'ud become o' her.

" 'An' mebbe,' sais he, 'you wouldn't mind steppin' over there to-morrow an' tellin' her.'

" 'Umph,' she sais, perkin' up her nose. 'You'll see me a-gaddin' round the walley settin' up with the girls fer you!'

"He set thinkin' a spell. Then he sais, trem'lous like, 'Nance, how fur is it to Crimmel's?'

" 'A miled to an inch,' sais she.

"He jest groaned an' went off to bed agin.

"They say that next day toward evenin' Absalom was seen to rise from his chair; to hesitate; to set down; to get up agin an' move toward the road. He got to the gate, pushed it half open, an' leaned on it. Tell sunset he stood there, gazin' wistful like toward Crimmel's placet. Then Nance called him in fer supper.

"Winter drove the lazy felly inter the house.

All day long he'd set be the windy watchin' fer Annie May; an' ez she passed he'd smile soft-like; 'hen she was gone he'd look solemn agin. An' all the time he kep' gittin' fatter an' fatter, an' more an' more onrastless.

"Winter broke an' March went by. Apryl first was a fine warm day, so Absalom took his chair out on the porch an' set there lookin' down the ridge into the walley, where the men was a-plowin'. All at oncet he heard a creakin' o' wheels an' a rattle o' gears that caused him to turn his eyes up the road. Outen the woods come a wagon piled high with furnitur'. It was a flittin', the Crimmel's flittin', ez he knowd 'hen he seen Andy drivin' an' the Missus an' Annie May ridin' on the horses. Bunkel was stunned—clean stunned. The flittin' went creakin' past the house, him jest settin' there starin'. He knowd what it meant to him. He knowd it was fer him jest the same ez the death of Annie May, but he couldn't do nawthin'. The wagon swung 'round the bend an' was out o' sight.

"'Hen Absalom seen the last o' the red bonnet flashin' in the sun, he th'owed his hands to his head like they was a pain there. Sudden he jumped from his chair an' run toward the road yellin', 'Hey! hey! Annie May!'

"He tore th'oo the gate, down the hill, an' 'round the turn. They was in sight agin.

"'Annie May!' he called, 'Annie May!'

"The wagon stopped. The girl climbed off the horse an' run toward him, stretchin' out her hands an' cryin', 'Absalom, Absalom!'

"'Hen he seen her comin' he set right down in the road to wait fer her. Her arms fell to her side, an' she stopped.

"'Annie May,' he called, 'come here. I've somethin' to tell yer.'

"She turned an' walked with hangin' head back to the wagon. She climbed on her horse, an' a minute later the flittin' disappeared in the hollow at the foot o' the ridge."

The Patriarch arose from his chair, walked slowly to the door and stood there looking out into the rain. The men about the stove gazed in astonished silence at his back.

The Miller spoke first. "Well, Grandpap?"

"Well?" said the old man, wheeling about.

"What happened?"

"Who sayd anything was a-goin' to happen?" snapped the Patriarch.

"What become o' Absalom?" asked the Store-keeper timidly.

"Oh, he died o' over-exertin'," said the Chronic Loafer, wearily, as he threw himself back on the counter.

The Patriarch gave no heed to this remark, but raising his right hand and emphasizing each word with a solemn wag of the forefinger, said, "Boys, I don't know what happened. Pap never sayd.

But now, 'henever I thinks o' a lazy man, I picturs Absalom Bunkel, settin' there in the road, his fat legs stretched out afore him, his fat arms proppin' up that unwieldy body o' hisn, his eyes an' his ears a-strainin' to see an' hear th'oo the darkness that gathered 'round him what he might 'a' seen an' heard allus hed he only hed the ambition to 'a' gone a few steps funder."

CHAPTER IV.

The Missus.

"A MAN without a missus is like an engyne without a governor—he either goes too slow or too fast," said the Chronic Loafer.

"Mighty souls!" cried the Miller. "What in the name o' common sense put that idee into yer head?"

"It was planted there be accident, cultiwated be experience, an' to-day it jest blossomed," was the reply.

The Loafer had come in from a morning on the ridges hunting rabbits. His old muzzle loader leaned against the counter and his hound Tiger was sitting at his side, his head resting on the master's knee and his solitary eye watching every movement of the thin, grizzled face, which was almost hidden by a blue cloth cap, with a low hanging visor, and ear-tabs. The Loafer removed the tabs and stuffed them into his pocket. Then he laid his hand on his dog's head and stroked it.

The ticking of the clock, which had a place on a shelf between two jars of stick-candy, accentuated

ated the long silence that followed. Tiger seemed to feel that the hush boded ill to his lord, and cocked one ear and uttered a low growl.

The Teacher pointed his forefinger at the Loafer and said, "I judge that you intended to imply that havin' a governor you run regular. Some engines, you know, run regular but very slow."

"An' some runs very fast," was the retort. "An' they buzzes pretty loud 'thout doin' a tremendous amount o' labor."

"Now you're gettin' personal and——"

"Boys, boys!" The Patriarch was rapping for order. "Don't git quarrelin' over the question of engynes. Fer my part the plain ole waterwheel beats 'em holly."

The Miller tilted over on his nail keg and tapped the Loafer on the elbow.

"Tell me," he said. "Where did ye git that idee? It sounds almanacky."

"That idee was ginirated this mornin' ez me an' Tige was roamin' 'round Gum hill tryin' to start a rabbit. They bein' no rabbits, me an' Tige set down an' gunned for idees. It was peaceful an' nice there on the ridge. The woods hed the reg'lar cheery November rattle, like a dried up, jolly ole man. The wind was a-shakin' the dead leaves, an' they was a-chipperin' an' chirpin'. The pignuts was jumpin' from the limbs, sloshin' th'oo the branches an' tumblin'

'round the ground. Overhead a couple of crows was a-floppin' about an' whoopin' like a lot of boys on skates, fer the air was bitin' like, an' put life in ye.

" Ez I set there on a lawg I minded a felly I oncet heard up to liter'ry society, who read a piecet 'bout how the year was dyin' fer autumn was at hand. I noticed Tige ez he was rollin' 'round chasin' pignuts, an' I sais to meself, sais I: 'Dyin'? Why, no. It's only in its second childhood.' An' I looked down the hill into the gut an' seen the smoke curlin' up th'oo the trees in the ole Horner clearin'. That's where I got the Missus. Then it was that that idee 'bout engynes an' weemen blossomed.

" Before the first time I ever seen that clearin' I kind o' lived in jerks. Sometimes I'd run hard an' fast, an' 'ud make a heap o' noise, an' smash all the machinery. Then I'd hev to lay off a month or so to git patched up agin. My pap was a cute man. He seen right th'oo me an' he knowd what was wrong. 'What you need is a governor,' sayd he. An' I got one. Sence then I've ben runnin' smooth an' reg'lar an' not wery fast. But I hain't broke no machinery, an' I've never stopped entirely.

" Now it went pretty hard with Pap after Mother died, fer he never did like housework an' was continual beggin' me to git merried. He was a-naggin' an' naggin' all the time, petickler

'hen he was washin' dishes. He'd p'int out certain girls in the walley that he thot 'ud hev me, an' he'd argy that I otter step up like a leetle man an' speak me mind to 'em. He even went so fur as to 'low he'd give me the whole placet ef unly I'd git some un to take the housework offen his hands. First it was Mary Potzer. She hed five hundred dollars an' was a special good match, but her looks was agin her. She was Omish, an' like most Omish folk was square built, 'cept fer bein' rounded off a leetle on top. The ole man wouldn't give me no peace tell I ast her. I didn't dast do that, but I tol' him I hed, an' that she sayd she 'ud take me ef he kep' on doin' the cookin'. That kind o' quieted him fer a spell, an' some months passed afore he tuk up the subject agin. Next he got to backin' Rosey Simpson. She was tolable good-lookin' an' lively, he sayd, an' I 'lowed he was right, unly she was too lively fer me. I minded the time I seen her sail inter Bumbletree's Durham bull 'hen he'd butted a petickler pet sheep o' hers. She made the ole beast feel so humble that I concided she might do fer a defender but never fer a wife. Next it was Sue Kindler an' then Sairy Somthin'-else, tell I was clean tired o' the whole idee.

"One night 'hen he'd ben pesterin' me most mighty bad I gits mad an' sais, 'See here, I ain't courtin' trouble. I'm comf'table an' happy ez I am,' I sais. 'I've got you an' Major—Major was

the dog—so why do I want to go settin' a trap 'hen I can't be sure what I'm goin' to catch?'

" 'My boy,' Pap answered, 'use the proper bait an' you'll git the right game.'

" Now Pap use to git off some good uns oncet in a while, but I wasn't in fer givin' him the credit. I scatted the whole plan. I didn't know so much then ez I knows now. Still, sometim's I 'low that ef it hedn't 'a' ben fer Major, I might o' dissypinted the ole man anyhow. Major was a coon dog, an' a mighty fine one, bein' half setter, quarter houn', an' last quarter coach. Me an' him was great buddies. Wherever we went he allus hed an eye out fer game. He knowd the seasons, too. Ef it was September he was watchin' fer squirrels; October, fer patridges; November, rabbits; springtime, girls. It was in the spring 'hen I happened to hear Si Bumbletree speakin' o' a petickler fine lot o' saplin's fer walkin' sticks that was growin' on the chestnut flats at the foot o' the mo'ntain jest above Andy Horner's clearin'. So I sais to meself, I sais, it bein' a fine warm day, I'll jest mosey up there an' git me one o' them staffs. It was a good th'ee mile up the walley an' over the ridge an' acrosst the gut, but I found the placet all right an' cut me a nice straight cane. I was comin' home, peelin' off the bark an' not thinkin' o' anything in petickler, 'hen I hear Major givin' a low growl. I looked up. We was passin' Horner's clearin'. There stood

the dog, foreleg lifted, tail straight out, nose pintin' th'oo the blackberry bushes 'long the fence.

" 'There is somethin' pretty important,' I sais to meself.

" An' with that I walks up to the hedge an' peeks over.

" Settin' on the groun', weedin' the onion-patch, was the prettiest girl I ever laid eyes on. She looked up from een under her sunbonnet outen a pair o' sparklin' blue eyes, an' showed two rosy cheeks with a perk leetle nose atween 'em. Major he hed ducked th'oo a hole in the fence an' come out on the other side, an' was standin' solemn-like, lookin' at her. All o' a sudden he begin jumpin' up an' down, first on his front legs an' then on his hint legs, archin' his neck, waggin' his tail, an' showin' his teeth like he was smilin' all over.

" 'That's a nice dog you hev,' sais the girl, kind o' musical. She had stopped her weedin' an' was settin' up lookin' at the houn'.

" 'Yes,' sais I, 'he is a tolable nice animal.'

" Then I thinks to meself, 'Major seems to like her; I wonder how she'd suit Pap.'

" Soon ez that come into me mind I seen it was time I got out. I turned an' walked down the road harder than I'd ever walked afore.

" That night I couldn't eat no supper. I'd never felt that same way an' it worrit me. I knowd no cause fer it, yit I kind o' thot I didn't keer

whether I lived or died. It worrit Pap too. He 'lowed he'd hev to powwow me.

" 'How are ye goin' to powwow me,' sais I, 'hen ye don't know what I'm sufferin' from? What I've got ain't nawthin', yit I wish it was somethin' jest to take me mind offen it.'

" That was ez near ez I could git to the disease. Pap leaned back in his cheer an' laughed like he'd die. 'Hen he'd finished splittin' his sides he come over to where I was settin' be the fire.

" 'What you needs,' sais he, 'is to go out an' look at the moon.'

" Before that I'd never thot o' the moon 'cept ez a kind o' lantern to hunt coons by. But 'hen I tuk his advice, an' lit me pipe, an' went out an' set on the pump trough, watchin' the ole felly come climbin' over the ridges, all yellin' an' smilin' an' friendly, I seen he hed a new uset. Whatever it was I'd ben sufferin' from kind o' passed away an' left me ca'm an' peaceful. Me brain seemed like a pool o' wotter in a wood, all still-like, 'cept for a few ripples o' idees on the surface. How long I set there I don't know. I might 'a' ben there all night hed the ole man not called me een.

" The first thing I seen ez I went into the house, was Major crouchin' be the fire watchin' it very intent. His supper lay beside him. Not a bone hed ben teched.

" 'Whatever it is,' sais I, 'it's ketchin'.'

"They was nawthin' doin' 'round the house next day after breakfast, so I minded that Pap hedn't a walkin'-stick. I concided I'd mosey up to the chestnut flats an' cut me a staff fer the ole man. Major went along, an' we got a petickler nice piece o' kinnykinnick wood. On the road home we happened to pass be Horner's clearin'. Ez we was opposite the house I heard some un a-choppin' an' seen the chips flyin' up over the hedge. Feelin' kind o' thirsty I stopped een to git a drink o' wotter. There she was a-splittin' firewood. 'Hen I explained, she pinte out the spring an' went on with her work. Ye might 'a' s'posed we was unly two coon dogs hed dropped een fer a call, she was so cool. But I wasn't fer goin' tell I'd at least passed the time a day, so I fixed meself on a block o' oak with Major beside me.

" 'What are ye doin'?' I asts, be way o' openin' up.

" 'It doesn't look like ez tho' I was knittin', does it?' she sais kind o' sharp.

" With that she drove the axe th'oo a stick o' hickory ez big 'round ez my body. It was all I could git outen her. So me an' Major jest set there watchin' quiet-like. It was amazin' the way she could chop wood—amazin'—an' I enjoyed it most a mighty well. The axe 'ud swish th'oo the air over her head; down it 'ud come on the lawg, straight an' true; out 'ud fly a th'ee-cornered

chip ez neat ez ef it hed ben sawed. She never looked one way nor the other, nor paid no attention, but kep' a-pilin' up firewood tell they was enough to last a week. Then she stuck the axe in the choppin' block and walked inter the house. Me an' Major moved on.

"That night I couldn't git no sleep. The ole trouble come on agin, an' I went out an' looked at the moon tell final I dozed off in the pump-trough. 'Hen I woke next mornin' I knowd what was wrong. I knowd that what I hed was somethin' I'd be better without, yit hed I to do it over agin I wouldn't hev awoided it. I knowd I could cut all the saplin's offen the chestnut flats an' I wouldn't git no ease. 'Hen I went over the ridge that day I didn't try to fool meself cuttin' staffs. No sir. I walked straight fer the clearin'. Ez I come near the house I whistled pretty loud to give warnin'. At the gate I looked een. No one was 'round. I thot to meself she was in the house, so I whistled louder. Major seemed to understand too, an' begin barkin' to beat all. But it hedn't no effect. That kind o' made me feel down like an' me heart weighed wery heavy ez I set on the stoop to wait fer her. All o' a sudden I hear a rat-tat-tat comin' from the barn. There she was on the roof, a-nailin' shingles. I walked down an' looked up at her.

" 'Hello !' I calls.

" 'Hello !' sais she. With that she drove five

shingle nails one after another, never payin' no attention.

“‘What are ye doin’?’ I asts ez I fixed me-self on a chicken-coop an’ lighted me pipe. It’s pretty hard talkin’ to a girl ’hen she’s mendin’ a barn roof, an’ ez I didn’t git no answer I stood up an’ yelled at the top o’ me voice, ‘What are ye doin’?’

“‘Well,’ sais she, ‘I s’pose it does look ez tho’ I’m playin’ the melodium, don’t it?’

“She wasn’t in a verry sociable turn o’ mind, but I’m one o’ those felly’s that oncet he gits his plow in the furrow don’t pull it out tell he has at least gone oncet ’round the field. So I jest set there smokin’ while she kep’ on workin’. By an’ by the dinner-bells over in the walley begin to ring, an’ she come down. She never sayd a word ’hen she reached the ground, but I wasn’t to be put back that ’ay. I steps up verry polite an’ gits her hammer an’ kerrys it inter the house fer her. Weemen allus likes them leetle attentions. She did any way, fer she smiled, an’ ’hen I ’lowed I must be goin’, she sayd good-by. An’ I went.

“That night ez I set on the pump-trough with Major beside me, watchin’ the moon ez it come climbin’ up over the ridges, I hear plain an’ distinct the rat-tat-tat o’ the hammer an’ the shingle nails. I leaned back agin the pump, closed me eyes an’ drank in the music. Soon I seen it all agin—the barnyard with the razor-back

pig an' the broken-horned cow browsin' 'round ; the barn, so ole an' tumble-down that the hay was stickin' out all over it like it growed on the boards ; the roof, half a dozen pigeons cooin' on one end, an' her on the other tackin' away. What a pictur it 'ud made fer a reg'lar hand-paintin' !

"After breakfast Pap lighted his pipe, leaned back in his cheer an' asted me, 'How's that ailment o' yours gittin' now?'

"'Ailment?' sais I, cool ez ye please. 'Why, I found it didn't amount to nawthin'. It's all gone.'

"Pap smoked a bit. He was blinkin' like somethin' amused him powerful.

"'By the way,' he sais, 'I was up past Horner's clearin' yestidy an' I seen that humly dotter o' Andy's a——'

"It was so quick an' sudden, I forgot meself. Never afore hed I felt so peculiarly, so almighty mad.

"'See here,' I cries, jumpin' up an' liftin' me cheer, 'don't you dast talk o' Andy Horner's dotter that 'ay,' I sais. 'Ef ye do——'

"I stopped, fer he'd leaned back, an' was lookin' at the ceilin' an' laughin' an' laughin'.

"'I thot ye hedn't no ailment,' he sais.

"Be the twinkle in his eye I seen how he'd fooled me, an' I set down feelin' smaller than a buntty hen.

"'Ye see,' sais he, 'I was comin' th'oo the flats

this mornin' after I'd ben fishin' trout up in the big run, an' ez I passed Horner's I noticed a most remarkable sight. There was Pet Horner a-nailin' shingles on the barn roof while a strange man set on a chicken-coop smokin'. I sais to meself, I sais, 'Ef that's the way he gits a missus, I'll do the housework tell me dyin' day.'

"The ole man wasn't laughin' now. He was on a subject that was verry dear to him. His voice was husky with earnestness.

"'Why don't ye spruce up?' he sais. 'Can't ye chop wood fer her, or churn fer her, or pick some stone offen the clearin' fer her? Unly do somethin' to show her ye ain't the laziest man in the walley. Show her your right side.'

"'Pap,' sais I, 'hen my Missus takes me I wants her to know me jest ez I am, not as I otter be. Ef there's any lettin' on afore the weddin' there'll be no lettin' up after it.'

"With that I gits up an' walks ouden the house, whistlin' fer Major.

"Him an' me went up to Horner's together. We found her churnin', an' set down in the grass an' watched. Ez I watched I got to thinkin' over what the ole man hed sayd. I seen that perhaps he was right; that I'd git her quicker ef I worked harder. The pictur of gittin' her quicker almost made me git up an' do the churnin'. But I thot agin. Ef I churned now I'd hev to churn allus or else I'd be cheatin' her.

Ef she knowd she was takin' a man who was agin the wery suggestion' she'd never hev no cause to complain. So I jest lay there chewin' a straw an' lookin'.

"That's the way I done me courtin' day after day all that summer. It was slow. Mighty, but it was slow! Sometim's I got discouraged an' thot the eend was never comin' an' I'd better give up. Then she'd drop a word or a look or somethin' that kind o' kep' me hangin' on. It seemed like she was gittin' used to me. We seldom sayd anything, fer she was a thinkin' woman. Fer me, I remembered how Pap allus allowed it was less dangerous fer a man to put a boy in charge o' his sawmill than to let his heart run his tongue. So I set an' sayd nawthin', but looked a heap.

"It was October 'hen I concided I'd make a trial, fer even ef nawthin' come of it no petickler harm 'ud be done. So I ast her. She jest th'owed back her head, folded her arms an' looked at me.

" 'Well?' I sais.

"She looked a leetle harder an' a leetle sterner. Her eyes kind o' snapped.

" 'Well?' I sais agin.

" 'I hev'n't no petickler dislike,' sais she, 'but ye ain't my idee of a man. A man should move sometim's.'

" 'Pet,' I sais, 'I know I ain't much on leetle

things, but wait tell they's big things to do. Then I'll startle ye !'

"I turned an' walked out o' the gate an' 'long the road toward home.

"She didn't hev to wait long. That wery night ez I set on the porch, I seen a big snake o' fire come pokin' his head over the mo'ntain top to the north'ard of us. Fer a time he laid 'round in the huckleberry shelf there, rollin' an' floppin' about the bushes, like he was takin' in the walley an' wonderin' what was the easiest way down the side to the chestnut flats where they was big piles o' leaves, laurel bushes dry ez chips, an' hundreds o' dead trees, all waitin' to be devoured. Mighty fine the ole snake looked, an' a heap o' pleasure it give me watchin' him.

"The thin line o' fire begin to spread ez it advanced, an' soon the whole side o' the mo'ntain was ablaze. It was jest a solid bed o' red. Now an' then the flames 'ud jump to the top o' some ole pine, the tree 'ud beat wild like to an' fro, tryin' to shake 'em off, an' showers o' sparks 'ud go whirlin' away inter the sky.

"'Mighty souls !' I sais to meself. 'It's jest like a monstrous big band festival 'hen all the boys is out with torches an' they hes a bonfire an' fireworks an' music.'

"Music ? I hear agin the rat-tat-tat o' the hammer an' the shingle nails ; an' I thot o' her.

"The fire hed reached the flats. It was movin'

right on the clearin' where she was all alone, fer Andy was workin' in the sawmill in Windy Gap.

"You uns otter seen me an' Major skippin' up the lane then. They was no loafin' about it. Never oncet did we stop tell we reached the ridge. There we left the road an' cut th'oo the fiel's. Soon we was over them an' in the woods. We stumbled on an' on, tumblin' over lawgs an' stones, an' fallin' inter bushes tell we reached the top o' the hill an' looked right down inter the gut.

"There we stopped, fer we was spelled like—me an' Major—an' jest stood an' stared. The smoke filled the whole leetle walley. Th'oo it we could see the glare o' the burnin' chestnut flats. Big tongues o' flame was shootin' up an' lickin' 'round in the air. We could hear the snappin' an' crashin' o' the trees. We could hear the scream o' the wild-cats ez they was tearin' fer the open country. A coon run right inter Major, an' scampered away agin, snarlin', but the hound never oncet lifted his eyes offen the gut. A loud snortin' startled me, an' a razor-backed pig come gallopin' over the hill. Then they was a bellerin' an' a crashin' o' bushes, below us. The broken-horned cow run pantin' up the ridge, an' by us an' on th'oo the woods. 'Hen me an' Major seen her we jumped for'a'd together an' tore down th'oo the blindin' smoke to the clearin'.

"She was standin' in the doorway, her head buried in her apron, cryin' like her heart 'ud break. The minute I set eyes on her I forgot all about the fire an' thot unly o' her. I jest stood there awkward an' looked at the girl, fer I was spelled agin, unly worse.

" 'Pet,' I sais, after a bit, 'what's wrong?'

" 'Wrong,' she cries th'oo her apron. 'They's all gone—the cow, the pig, the chickens—gone fer the walley. Soon the clearin' 'll go too.'

"With that she raised her hand an' pinted th'oo the woods, over the flats to the solid wall o' fire.

"Then I laughed. An' I hed the right to laugh, fer ez I looked at them flames dartin' among the trees it seemed like they was the best friends I ever had.

" 'It's mean to cheat sech good fellers out o' sech a nice clearin',' I sais to meself ez I run along the wood road puttin' the torch to the dry leaves. 'It's mean, but I can't spend the rest o' me life settin' on the pump-trough watchin' the moon.'

"An' cheat 'em I did. The leaves an' the under-brush cot like powder, an' the counter-fire went runnin' over the flats towards the mo'ntain to tell the ole fire snakes that it wasn't no uset to try to git to the clearin' fer they was no path to it 'cept over ashes.

"We stood there in the wood-road watchin' it —Pet on one side, then Major, then me. Fer a

long time we sayd nawthin', tell I couldn't stand it no more.

" 'Pet,' sais I, wery abrupt, 'do you think now I'm so awful slow?'

" 'It ain't them ez runs fastest allus goes the straightest an' truest,' she answers.

" It wasn't wery much to say. Any girl might 'a' done jest the same thing. But from the way she looked, I knowd I'd got my Missus."

CHAPTER V.

The Awfulest Thing.

THE Chronic Loafer sat upon the anvil. A leather apron was tied about his neck, and behind him stood the Blacksmith, nipping at his great shock of hair with a tiny pair of scissors. He was facing the Tinsmith and the Miller, who had climbed up on the carpenter bench, and by twisting his neck at the risk of his balance, he could see the tall, thin man standing by the mule which the helper was shoeing. The stranger had hair that reached to his shoulders, a clean-shaven upper lip, a long beard and a benign aspect that denoted him a Dunkard. He had been telling a few stories of the recent events in Raccoon Valley, whence he hailed.

"So it ain't sech a slow-goin', out-o'-the-way placet ez you unsez think—still," he said.

The Blacksmith thoughtfully turned to address him.

"Well, stranger——"

"Ow—ow!" cried the Loafer. "Is you a barber or a butcher?"

"Sights!" exclaimed the worthy smith. "Now that was a jag I give ye, wasn't it?"

He resumed his task with redoubled vigor. The Loafer closed his eyes and commenced to sputter.

"Mighty souls! Go easy. Are you tryin' to choke me?"

"Sights!" said the other in apologetic tones, "I didn't notice. Now I did come near chokin' ye, didn't I? I was interested in Raccoon Walley."

Then he began to clip very slowly.

The Loafer opened one eye cautiously and fixed it on the stranger.

"What was that awful thing I heard ye tellin' 'bout snakes, jest afore I was smothered under that last hay-load o' hair?"

"Oh, hoop-snakes," replied the Dunkard. He paused from his work of brushing the flies from the mule's legs with a horse-tail. "We hev plenty o' them 'round our placet. They don't trouble no one tho' tell ye bother them. Then they're awful."

He turned his attention to the beast's hoofs and began sweeping them. A smile was lurking about the corners of his mouth.

"Did ye ever run agin any o' these hoop——"

The Blacksmith's query was cut short by a loud "Ouch!"

"See here," said the Loafer with emphasis.

"Either he'll hev to quit tellin' stories or I quit gittin' me hair cut." Then to the stranger, "Is hoop-snakes so wery pisonous?"

"Pisonous!" replied the Dunkard. "Well, I should say they was. One o' the awfullest things I ever seen was jest the ozzer day 'hen I was workin' in the fiel'. All o' a suddent one o' these wipers jumps outen the hay an' strikes. I seen it jest in time to step aside. Its fangs struck the han'le o' me fork."

The stranger fell to brushing flies again.

"Well, what happened that——"

"There ye go," the Loafer cried, ducking forward and almost tumbling from the anvil. "Keep your eye on my head an' not on every Tom, Dick an' Harry in the shop." He readjusted himself on his perch and blew away a bunch of hair that had settled on his nose.

"What happened?" he inquired, fixing his least exposed eye on the man from Raccoon Valley.

"Quick ez a flash the han'le o' my pitch-fork swole up tell it was thick ez my arm."

The Dunkard had fixed his gaze intently on the forefeet of the mule and was beating them industriously with the horse-tail.

The smith wheeled about abruptly and gazed at the stranger.

"That was an awful thing to experience," he said. But there was a ring of doubt in his voice,

The Loafer peered over his shoulder and ventured. "Yes. It was the worst jag yit. But I don't mind. I'm gittin' accustomed."

The rattle of the pile of wheels upon which the G. A. R. Man was sitting announced that the veteran was getting restless and was preparing for action. For a long time he had been smoking in silence, listening to the strange tales of the strange man from Raccoon Valley. Now he spoke.

"If your story is true then that was an awful thing." He seemed to be weighing each word. "Still, it wasn't so awful ez a thing that happened to me durin' the war."

"There ye are agin," cried the Loafer. "Can't a man tell a story 'thout you tryin' to go him one better? I don't believe ye was in the war anyway."

"Don't I git a pension?" The veteran closed one eye and stuck out his lower jaw threateningly.

"That ain't no sign," ventured the Miller from the carpenter bench.

"Well, what fer a sign does you unsez want?" roared the G. A. R. Man. "Does you expect a felly to go th'oo life carryin' a musket? Ef ye does——"

"See here," said the Blacksmith, "youse fellys is gittin' that mule all excited. Ef you're goin' to quarrel you'd better go outside where there's lots o' room fer ye to run away in."

"Now—now—now!" said the Dunkard, wagging the horse-tail at the company. "Don't git fightin'. Ef he knows anything awfuller then that hoop-snake venture let him out with it."

"I do," said the veteran. "But I don't perpose to hev it drug outen me fer you uns to hoot at."

His tone was pacific, and his companions promised not to hoot.

"The awfulest thing I ever hed to do with," he said, "was down in front o' Richmon' durin' the war. Our retchment—the Bloody Pennsylvany—was posted kind o' out like from the rest o' the army. We lay there fer th'ee weeks doin' nawthin' but eatin', sleepin', drinkin' an' listenin' to the roar o' the guns over to the front. Still it wasn't pleasant, fer we was allus expectin' somethin' to happen. It's a heap sight better to hev somethin' happenin' then to be waitin' fer it to come. But final it come.

"One mornin' at daybreak the guard was bein' changed, an' down on one post they found the picket dead, but not a mark was they on him. It looked wery queer. We'd seen no enemy fer a week an' yit here was a felly killed plumb on his post, within stone th'ow of our camp. It made the boys feel clammy like, I tell ye, an' they wasn't many a-hankerin' to go on that beat at night. It was a lonely placet, anyway, right on the edge o' a leetle clump o' woods in a holler

th'oo which run a creek, gurglin' in a way that made ye creep from your heel-taps to your hat. But the post hed to be covered. Ez luck 'ud hev it, my tent-mate, Jim Miggins, ez nicet a man ez ever shouldered a musket, was stationed there. Next mornin' the relief goes around, an' Jim Miggins is lyin' dead be the stream—not a mark on him nowhere. Still they was no sign o' the enemy, an' we'd a clean sweep o' fiel's five miles acrosst the country. Mebbe we wasn't puzzled."

"Why didn't the general put a whole regiment in them woods an' stop it?" asked the Loafer.

"That wasn't tactics," answered the veteran. "Ye may think you knows better how to run a war then our general, but ye don't. It wasn't tactics, an' even ef it hed ben it wasn't the way the Bloody Pennsylvany done things. One man takes the post next night ez usual, young Harry Hopple o' my company, a lad with more grit then a horse that cribs. In the mornin'—Harry's dead—no mark on him—no sign o' the enemy nowhere. Don't tell me that wasn't awfuller then hoop-snakes. Why, every man knowd now that ef he drawed that post he was a goner. That was a recognized rule—he was a goner. 'Hen a felly gits it he sets down an' packs up his duds; then he writes home to his ma or his girl, sais good-by to the boys an' goes out. Mornin' comes—he's dead be the stream—not a mark on him—no enemy in sight. That was the way Andy Young,

leetle Hiram Dole, Clayton Binks o' my company, an' a dozen others was tuk off."

"I can't see, nuthcr, why the general didn't fill them woods with soldiers," the Miller interrupted.

"Why! It wasn't tactics; that's why," the G. A. R. Man replied brusquely. "The Bloody Pennsylvany didn't do things that way. No, sir. The general he cal'lated that we couldn't be in that placet more'n four weeks more, which would cost jest twenty-eight men. He sais it wasn't square to order a man there, so he calls fer wolunteers. What does I do? I wolunteers. I goes to the general an' sais I'm willin' to try my luck first. An' he sais, sais he, a-layin' one hand on me shoulder, 'Me man, ef we'd a few more like you, the war 'ud soon be ended. An'——'"

"Meanin' the other side 'ud 'a' licked," the Loafer interposed.

The veteran paid no attention to this remark but continued: "He promised me a promotion ef I come out alive. That night I packs up me things, writes a letter to me wife, an' sais good-by to the boys. Then I gits me gun, pours in th'ee inches o' powder, puts in a wad; next, th'ee bullets an' a wad; next a half dozen buckshot an' a wad. An' on top o' it all, jest fer luck, I rammed a bit o' tobacky. At twelve o'clock I relieved the man on post in the holler. Mebbe me heart didn't beat. Mebbe it wasn't awfuller then

hoop-snakes. The wind was sighin' mournful th'oo the leaves; a leetle slice o' moon was peekin' down th'oo the trees 'hen the clouds give it a chancet; an' there gurglin' along was the creek be which I expected I'd be found in the mornin' layin' dead, no mark on me nowhere.

"I'd made up me mind, tho', that I was goin' to come out of it whole ef I could. I wasn't no fool to set down an' be tuk off without raisin' a rumpus about it. No, sir. I kept a sharp eye in every direction ez I walked to an' fro, down the holler on one side, up on the other, back agin, an' never stoppin'. It come one o'clock, an' I give number eight an' all's well. I hear the report go 'long the posts; then everything was quiet. It come two o'clock an' I give all's well agin. Hardly was everything still 'hen I hear a rustlin' noise, right out in the fiel' beyant the creek, not twenty feet away, an' yit me eyes had ben coverin' that petickler spot fer an hour an' not a hate hed I seen. But there it was, a stand-in' hazy-like in the dark, the awfulest thing I ever laid eyes on."

The veteran had arisen from the pile of wheels and was glaring at the company, "What does I do? Does I set down an' be tuk off like the other fellys? No. I ups an' fires an' hits it right atween the eyes."

He resumed his seat and began refilling his pipe. An expectant silence reigned in the shop.

The Blacksmith waited until he saw the veteran light a match and fall to smoking.

"Go on," he cried, making a threatening movement with his scissors.

"They ain't no more to tell," said the G. A. R. Man nonchalantly. "Wasn't that awfuller then a dozen hoop-snakes?"

"Well, what was the thing ye shot?" asked the Loafer, slipping off the anvil and facing the pile of wheels.

The old soldier's clay pipe fell from his hand and crashed into a hundred pieces on the floor. He opened wide his mouth in vain effort to speak, but the words failed to come.

"What was it?" shouted the Loafer.

"Well, I'll swan ef I know," replied the veteran meekly.

CHAPTER VI.

The Wrestling Match.

THE village had awakened from its long winter of sleep. It had shaken off its lethargy and stepped forth into the light and sunshine to take up life in the free air until the months should speed around and the harsh winds and the snows drive it back again to a close kitchen and a stifling stove. The antiquated saw-mill down by the creek buzzed away with a vim that plainly told that the stream was swollen with the melted snows of the winter just passed. The big grist-mill bumped and thumped in deep melodious tones, as though it were making an effort to drown the rasping, discordant music of its small but noisy neighbor. From the field beyond the line of houses came the melancholy "haw, gee, haw, gee-up" of the man at the plow and the triumphant calls of the chickens, as they discovered each luscious worm in the newly-turned furrow. A few robins flitted among the still leafless branches of the trees, and down in the meadows

beyond the bridge an occasional venturesome lark or snipe whistled merrily.

The double doors of the store were wide open. Had all the other signs of spring been missing, this fact alone would have indicated to the knowing that if the snows had not melted and the birds not come back, it was high time they did. Those doors never stood open until the Patriarch felt it in his bones that the winter was gone and he could with safety leave the side of the stove within and migrate to the long bench without, to bask in the sunshine. This morning the old man arose from his accustomed chair with a look of wonderment on his face. He swung one leg to and fro for a moment, then rapped on his knee gently with the heavy knob of his cane. He tapped his head mysteriously with his forefinger and gazed in silence out of the window, taking in the outward signs.

"Boys," he said at length, "it's time we was gittin' out agin. Spring has come."

With that he hobbled toward the door.

"Good, Gran'pap," said the Chronic Loafer, rolling off the counter and following.

Then the Storekeeper opened both doors.

The old oak bench that had stood neglected through the long winter, exposed to wind and warping rain, gave a joyous creak as it felt again on its broad, knife-hacked back the weight of the Patriarch and his friends. It kicked up its one

short, hickory leg with such vehemence as to cause the Storekeeper to throw out his hands, as though the world had dropped from under him and he was grasping at a cloud for support.

"Mighty souls!" he cried, when he had recovered his equilibrium and composure.

"My, oh, my!" murmured the old man, his face beaming with contentment as he sat basking in the sun. "Don't the old bench feel good agin? Why, me an' this oak board hes ben buddies fer nigh onter sixty years."

The season seemed to have infused new life into the Chronic Loafer as it had nature. He suddenly tossed off his coat, with one leap cleared the steps and began dancing up and down in the road.

"It jest makes a felly feel like wrastlin', Gran'pap," he shouted, waving his arms defiantly at the bench. "Come on."

The Patriarch stroked his long beard and smiled amusedly at this unexpected exhibition of energy. The Miller's nose curled contemptuously skyward, and he fell to beating the flour out of his coat to show his indifference to the challenge. The Tinsmith puffed more vigorously at his pipe, so that the great clouds of smoke that swept upward from the clay bowl, enveloped the Storekeeper and caused him to sneeze violently.

At this indisposition on the part of the four to take up the gauntlet he had thrown down, the Loafer became still more defiant.

"Hedgins!" he sneered. "You uns is all afraid, eh?"

"Nawthin' to be afraid of," snapped the Miller. "Simple because spring's come, ez it's ben comin' ever since I can remember, I hain't a-goin' to waller 'round in a muddy road."

The School Teacher laid his left hand upon his heart, and fixing a solemn gaze on the roof of the porch, recited: "In the spring the young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love."

"There ye go agin," cried the Loafer, "quotin' that ole Fifth Reader o' yourn."

"That," said the pedagogue, "is Tennyson."

"I thot it was familar," exclaimed the Store-keeper. A smile crept into his usually vacant face, and he slapped the Teacher on the knee. "You mean ole Seth Tennyson that runs the Shingletown creamery. He's a cute un."

The reply was a withering, pitying glance.

"It sounds a heap more like Seth's brother Bill," ventured the Miller.

"Don't git argyin' on that," said the Loafer. "There's nawthin' particular new or good in it any way. The main pint is I bantered ye an' you uns 's all dead skeert."

"Come, come," said the Patriarch, beating his stick on the floor to call the boaster to order. "Ef I was five year younger I'd take your banter; I'd druv yer head inter the mud tell you'd be afraid of showin' up at the store fer a year, fer

fear some un'd shovel ye inter the road. That's what I'd do. I hates blowin', I do—I hates blowin'. Fur be it from me to blow, particular ez I was somethin' of a wrastler 'hen I was a young un."

"I bet I could 'a' th'owed you in less time 'an it takes me to set down," the Loafer said, as he seated himself on the steps and got out his pipe.

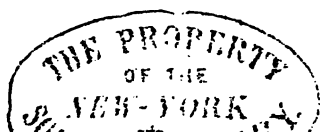
"Th'owed me, would you? Well, I'd 'a' liked to hev seen you a-th'owin' me." He shook his stick at the braggart. "Why, don't you know that 'hen I was young I was the best wrastler in the walley; didn't you ever hear o' the great wrastlin' me and Simon Cruller done up to Swampy Holler school-house?"

"Did Noar act as empire?" asked the Loafer.

"What does you mean be talkin' of Noar an' sech like 'hen I'm tellin' of wrastlin'? Tryin' to change the subject I s'pose, eh?" cried the Patriarch, reddening with anger. "Don't you know——"

"Tut-tut, Gran'pap," said the Storekeeper, gently taking the raised cane in his hand and forcing it back into an upright position, one end resting on the floor, while on the other were piled the old man's two fat hands. "Don't mind him. Go on with your story."

The Patriarch's wrath passed as quickly as it had come. He speedily wandered back into his youth, and soon was so deep in the history of



Simon Cruller, of Simon Cruller's family and of Becky Stump as to be completely oblivious to his tormentor's presence.

"Me an' Sime Cruller was buddies," he began at length. "That was tell we both kind o' set our minds on gittin' Becky Stump. You uns never seen her, eh? Well, mebbe you never seen her grave-stun. It stands be the alderberry bushes in the buryin'-groun', an' ef you hain't seen it ye otter, fer then ye might git an idee what sort o' a woman she was. Pretty? Why, she was a model, she was—a perfect model. Hair? You uns don't often see sech hair nowadays ez Becky Stump hed—soft an' black like. Eyes? Why, they sparkled jest like new buggy paint. An' mighty souls, but she could plough! She wasn't none of your modern girls ez is too proud to plough. Many a day I set over on the porch at our placet an' looked down acrosst the walley an' seen her a-step-pin' th'oo the fiel', an' I thot how I'd like to hev one han'le while she'd hev the other, an' we'd go trampin' along life's furrow together."

"Now Gran'pap, I 'low you've ben readin'——"

"Can't you keep still a piece?" roared the Miller.

The Loafer returned to his pipe and silence.

"The whole thing come to a pint at a spellin' bee up to Swampy Holler school," continued the Patriarch, unmindful of the interruption. "Becky Stump was there an' looked onusual pretty, fer it

was cold outside an' the win' hed made her face all red on the drive over from home. Sime was there, too, togged out in store clothes, his hair all plastered down with bear ile, an' with a fine silk tie aroun' his collar that 'ud 'a' ketched the girls real hard hed I not hed a prettier one.

"Ez luck 'ud hev it, me an' Sime Cruller was on opposite sides. It wasn't long afore I scen he was tryin' to show off with his spellin'. It's strange, but it's a failin' with men that ez soon ez they gits their minds set on a particular girl they wants to show off before her. Why most of 'em taller up their boots, put on their Sunday clothes an' go walkin' by their girl's house twicet a day fer no reason at all but jest to be seen lookin' togged up an' han'som. Men allus seems to want the weemen to know they is better spellers, or better somethin' else 'an some other feller. They ain't no reason fer it. No common-sense woman is goin' to merry no man simple because he can spell or wrestle better or husk more corn than anybody else. An' yit men'll insist on showin' off in them wery things 'henever they gits a chancet.

"It didn't take me five minutes to see that Sime Cruller was tryin' to show off afore Becky Stump; was tryin' to prove to her that he was a smarter lad than me. An' it didn't take me that long to concide I'd hev none of it. I seen him every time he spelled a hard un, look triumphant like at

her, settin' ez she was down be the stove ; then he'd grin at me. I seen it all, an' I spelled ez I never spelled afore, an' a mighty fine speller I was, too, 'hen I was young. Mebbe I didn't set all over Sime Cruller. Mebbe I didn't spile his showin' off. I don't jest exactly remember what the word was, but it must 'a' ben a long un with a heap of syllables, fer he missed it an' set down lookin' ez mad ez a bull 'hen he steps inter a bees' nes'. Three others missed it, an' it come to me. Why do you know them letters jest rolled off my tongue ez easy. You otter 'a' seen the look Becky Stump give me an' the look Sime give me. Huh !

“When intermission come, Sime he gits off in one corner an' begins blowin' to a lot of the boys. I heard him talkin' loud 'bout me, so I steps over. He sayd it was all a mistake ; that he could beat me at anything—spellin', wrastlin' or fishin'. He was showin' off agin, fer he talked loud like Becky Stump could hear. I makes up me mind I wouldn't stand his blowin'.

“‘See here, Sime Cruller!’ I sais, sais I, ‘you uns is nawthin' but a blow-horn,’ I sais. ‘You claims you can wrastle. Why, I can th'ow you in less time than it takes to tell it, an' if you steps outside I'll prove me words.’

“That kinder took Sime Cruller down, fer wrastlin' was his speciality an' he'd th'owed every felly in the walley 'ceptin' me, an' him an' me

hed never clinched, fer I wasn't considered much at a fight. But me dander was up an' I wasn't in fer lettin' him show off.

"' You th'ow me!' he sais. Then he begin to laugh like he'd die at the verry idee.

"With that we went outside, follered by the rest of the boys. They was a quarter-moon overhead, an' the girls put two candles in the school-house winders, so, with the snow, we could see pretty well.

"At it we went. Boys, you otter 'a' ben there! You otter 'a' seen it! That was wrastlin'! 'Hen Sime an' me clinched I ketched him 'round the waist with my right arm an' got a hold of the strap of his right boot with the forefinger of me left hand. He gits his left arm 'round my neck an' down my back somehow, an' with his right hand tears the buttons off me coat an' grabs me in the armhole of me waistcoat. Over we goes, like two dogs, snarlin', an' snappin', while the boys in a ring around us cheered, an' the girls crowdin' the schoolhouse porch trembled an' screamed with fright. We twisted, we turned, we rolled over an' over till we looked like livin' snowballs. Sime got off the boot I'd a holt on, an' give me a sudden turn that almost sent me on me back. But I was quick. Mighty souls, but I was quick! I ups with me foot an' lands me heel right on his chist, an' he went flyin' ten feet inter a snow-bank, kerryin' me coat-sleeve with him. He was lookin' up at the

moon 'hen I run up to him, an' I'd hed him down, but he turned over, an' they wasn't nawthin' fer me to do but to set on his back. I 'low I must 'a' set there fer half an hour, restin' an' gittin' me wind. Anyway, I was so long I almost forgot I was wrastlin', fer he give me a sudden turn, an' 'fore I knowd it he hed the waist holt an' hed almost th'owed me.

"But I was quick. Mighty souls, but I was quick! I keeps me feet an' gits one hand inter his waistcoat pocket an' hung to him. 'Henever you wrestles, git your man be the boot strap or the pocket, an' you has the best holt they is. Ef I hedn't done that I might not 'a' ben here to-day. But I done it, an' fer a full hour me an' Sime Cruller rolled 'round, even matched, Time an' agin I got sight o' Becky Stump standin' on the porch, her hands gripped together, her face pale, her eyes almost poppin' outen her head, she was watchin' us so hard, an' the very sight of her urged me on to inhuman efforts. It seemed to hev the same 'fect on Sime. Me heart beat so hard it made me buttons rattle. Still I kep' at it. Sime was so hot it was fer me jest like wrastlin' with a stove, an' still we kep' at it. Then all of a sudden—it was two hours after we hed fust clinched—everything seemed to swim—I couldn't feel no earth beneath—I only knowd I was still holdin' onto Sime--then I knowd nawthin'.

"'Hen I come to, I was layin' be the school-

house stove, an' Becky Stump was leanin' over me rubbin' a snowball acrosst me forehead. The other folks was standin' back like, fer they seemed to think that after sech an exhibition it was all settled an' they didn't want to disturb us.

" 'Becky,' I whispers, 'did I win?'

" 'You did,' she sais. 'You both fainted at oncet, but you fainted on top.'

" 'An' now I s'pose you'll hev me,' I sais, fer it seemed like they was somethin' in her eyes that kinder urged me on.

" She was quiet a piece; an' then she leans down an' answers, 'Do you think I wants to merry a fien'?' "

The Patriarch ceased his narration and fell to stroking his beard and humming softly.

" Well? " cried the Loafer.

" Well? " retorted the old man.

" Did she ever merry? "

The Patriarch shook his head.

" Go look at the grave-stun," he said, " an' on it you'll see wrote: 'Here lies Becky Stump. Her peaceful soul's at rest! ' "

CHAPTER VII.

The Tramp's Romance.

"WAS you ever dissypinted in love?" inquired the Chronic Loafer of the Tramp.

A light summer shower had driven the traveller to the shelter of the store porch for a few hours, and he was stretched easily along the floor with his back resting against a pillar. In reply to the question he brought the butt of his heavy hickory stick down on the loose boards with such vigor as to raise a small cloud of dust from the cracks, and cried, "Wull, have I!"

"Come tell us about it, ole feller," said the Tinsmith.

"Not muchy."

"We ain't surprised at your hevin' ben dissypinted," said the Loafer, "but it's your presumption catches me. What's her name?"

"I called her Emily Kate," answered the Tramp, wiping one of his eyes with his sleeve. "She'll allus be Emily Kate to me, though to other folks she ain't nothin'."

"A truly remarkable state of affairs," said the

Teacher. "I presume that the young woman must have been a mere chimera, a hallucination."

"Mebbe she was; mebbe she wasn't," the traveller replied. "I never knowd her well enough to git acquainted with all her qualities. In fact I've allus kept Emily Kate pretty much to meself an' have never said nothin' 'bcut her to nobody. But youse gentlemens asts so many questions, I s'pose yez might ez well know the hull thing. 'Bout three year ago I was workin' th'oo this valley toward the Sussykehanner River, an' one fine day—it was one o' them days when you feels like settin' down an' jest doin' nothin'—I come th'oo this very town an' went up the main road 'bout two mile tell I reached Shale Hill. I never knowd why I done it—it must 'a' ben fate—but I switched off onter the by-road there 'stead o' stickin' to the pike. I walked on 'bout a mile an' didn't meet no one or see no houses tell I come to a farm wit' a peach orchard sout' o' the barn.

"They was a nice grassy place under an apple tree on the other side the road, an' ez it was one o' them warm, lazy, summer days I made up me min' to rest, an' lay down there. Ye kin laugh at folks who allus talks weather, but I tell ye it does a powerful sight wit' a man. I know ef that had 'a' ben a rainy day I'd never had that fairy-core, ez the French calls it, that hit me then an' come near spoilin' me life.

"I was layin' there watchin' the clouds overhead, an' listenin' to the plover whistlin' out in the fiel's, an' to the tree-frawg bellerin' up in the locus', when all of a sudden I see a blue gleam in an apple tree in the orchard 'crosst the way. I watched it an' pretty soon made out that it was a woman. She was settin' there quiet an' still, like she was readin', an' down below I see the top of a chicking coop an' hear the ole hen cluckin'. I couldn't see much fer the leaves an' didn't git sight o' her face, but I made out the outlines o' that blue caliker dress an' jest kind o' drank 'em in.

"It was the day done it all. 'Fore I knowd it I begin to imagine the face that must 'a' fit that form. I pictured her like the girls that rides the mowin' machines in the agricult'ral advertisemen' chromos—yeller hair an' all. I wanted to try an' git sight o' her face but didn't dast, fer she'd 'a' seen me an' that 'ud a spoilt my chancet. So I lay there dreamin' like, an' 'fore I knowd it I could think o' nothin' but that girl in the tree, who I figured must 'a' ben a heap better-lookin' than a circus lady.

"It come sundown, an' ez I had to hustle to git supper I dragged meself together an' moved on. I went up the valley fer three days an' got 'bout thirty mile nearer the river. But I didn't have no peace. The hull time I was thinkin' o' nothin' but the girl in the blue caliker dress. I never felt

so queer before, an' didn't know jest what to do. Last I decided I'd hev to go back an' hev another look at her, so I turned 'round an' kivered me tracks.

"'Bout one day later, in the afternoon, I reached the orchard. Hanged ef she wasn't there an' set-tin' in a tree closer to the road! I didn't dast go near her, fer I knows how 'fraid the weemen is of us men. But I slid inter me ole placet, an' lay there watchin' her blue dress wavin' in the breeze. Then when I seen ez how she'd changed trees, I begin to think mebbe she'd seen me an' moved up a tree nearer the road kinder so ez we'd be closer."

The Tramp's voice broke and he paused.

"Now quit yer blubberin', Trampy," cried the Loafer, "an' git to the end o' this here yarn."

The vagrant rubbed his sleeve across his eyes and continued,

"Wull, ez I lay there watchin' her so still an' quiet, I begin to think. I wondered what her name must be, an' 'lowed it orter be a pretty one. I kind o' thought, bein' ez I didn't know it, I might give her one—the prettiest I could git up. I racked me brain an' final' sot on Emily Kate—that sounded high-toned. Then I begin to wonder who'd be so fort'nit ez ter git Emily, an' cussed meself for bein' sich a bum. I kind o' thought I might reform, but last I 'lowed ef she'd take me without me havin' to reform, it 'ud be a sight

pleasanter all 'round. I see how she'd moved up a tree an' kind o' wondered ef she'd notice me. The more I thought on it, the worse I got. I begin to think mebbe ef I cleaned up I wouldn't be so bad—in fact a heap better 'an lots o' folks I knows. By the time it come sunset I had concided to resk it, an' was thinkin' o' crawlin' over the fence an' interducin' meself. But me heart failed me. I put it off tell the next day an' slid over the fiel's to a barn an' spent the night.

“I didn't eat no breakfas'. I couldn't. When it come sun up I went down to the spring an' washed up. Then I cut fer the orchard, tendin' to wait tell she come. I didn't expect she'd be there so airly sence she'd likely do up the breakfas' dishes.

“I climbed the fence inter the road. Then what a sight I seen! I near yelled. A great big feller had his arm 'round her wais'. She was layin' all limp like, wit' her head pitched for'a'd so I couldn't see it, an' her feet was draggin' th'oo the timothy, fer the man was pullin' her 'long down the orchard. First I was fer runnin' to her resky, but I thought mebbe I'd better wait tell I see what come of it.

“The big feller, he pulled her, all limp, down to the other side, an' leaned her up agin a tree, an' hit her a punch wit' his fis'. The blue caliker sunbonnet drooped. Then he jumped the fence an' started away over the meddy.

"Me heart was a-thumpin' awful. I waited tell he was out o' sight. Then I slipped down to where Emily Kate lay half dead agin the tree. I seen a chicking coop there an' hear the ole hen cluckin'. I stepped up an' raised the girl's head. She had a straw face an' was keepin' hawks away from them chickings. My Emily Kate was a scare——"

The Tramp's voice grew husky and he faltered.

"See here, you ole fool," cried the Loafer, "it's quit rainin' this ten minutes an' you've kep' me from splittin' to-morrer's wood with yer bloomin' story."

The wanderer picked up his bandana and stick, arose and replied,

"Youse gentlemen 'sisted that I tell ye 'bout it. I tol' ye. Now I must be movin'."

A moment later he disappeared around the bend in the road just beyond the mill.

CHAPTER VIII.

Ambition---An Argument.

"I KNOW that I travels slow," said the Chronic Loafer, "but 'hen a felly travels fast, it keeps him so busy watchin' the horses, he sees mighty leetle o' the country an' gits awful jolted besides. It's a heap sight better to go slow, stoppin' at a stream to fish trout, or in the woods to take a bang at a coon, or at the store fer a leetle discussion—it's a heap sight easier."

He was sitting at the end of the porch, his back against the pillar; one leg stretched along the floor, the bare foot resting on its heel and wiggling to and fro in unison with his words; the other leg hanging down and swinging backward and forward like a pendulum.

The Patriarch had the end of the bench nearest him. Next sat the Miller meditatively chewing his forefinger. Then there was the Tinsmith smoking thoughtfully, and beside him, a stranger. This last person was a young man. His jaunty

golf cap, fresh pink shirt, spotless duck trousers and canvas shoes marked him as a barbarian. In fact he had swooped down from the mountains to the north but a few days before on a bicycle, taken board at the Shoemaker's, fixed a short briar pipe between his teeth and seated himself on the bench. At first he had been coldly received. The Store was suspicious. It closed its mouth and waited until it could find out something of the character of the newcomer. He volunteered no explanation, but sat and smoked. The Store grew desperate. At length it could stand the suspense no longer and nudged the stranger and inquired if he might not be a detective? The stranger laughed, said no, and busied himself with the making of smoke rings. Three days passed. Then the Store allowed maybe he might not be a drummer? No, he was not a drummer. The mystery was deepening. There were two things he was not. Now the Store smoked and smoked, and watched the mountains many days, until it had drawn an inspiration therefrom. It winked at the young man and guessed he had run away from his wife. But the stranger answered that he had never married.

Knowing that he was not a detective, a drummer, or a fugitive from some domestic hearthstone, the Store felt that it had learned something of his history and could afford to melt just a little. So now it was talking before him.

As the Loafer finished speaking, the stranger drew forth a leather case, carefully tucked his pipe away in it and returned it to his pocket. Then he remarked calmly, "I cannot agree with you. What would the world be to-day if all men held such ideas as you?"

The Patriarch, the Miller and the Tinsmith pricked up their ears and gazed at the speaker. At last the truth would be out.

The Loafer saw his opportunity.

"What do you do fer a livin'?" he asked.

"I'm a college man," was the bland reply.

Drawing his pendulum leg up on the porch, the Loafer clasped both knees in his arms. "Well," he drawled, "I 'low ef you is a kawledge man, they ain't nawthin' young enough to be a kawledge boy, is they?"

The Patriarch dropped his cane, clasped his hands to his fat sides, leaned back so that his head rested against the wall, and gagged. The Tinsmith and the Storekeeper laughed so loud that the School Teacher tossed aside the county paper and came running to the door to inquire what the joke was.

"I'm blessed ef I know," said the Miller, he being the only one of the party who had retained his powers of speech. He laid a hand on the student's knee and asked, "Did you make a joke?"

But the young man had dived into his pocket

and got out his pipe again, and was busy filling it and lighting it and smoking it, by this act asserting his manhood. He now joined good-naturedly in the laughter.

"How much does a kawledge man git a week?" asked the Loafer. "It must pay pretty well, jedgin' from your clothes."

"He gets nothing," was the reply. "I am studying, preparing myself for my work in life."

"My, oh, my!" murmured the Patriarch. "Preparin'—preparin'? Why, 'hen I was your age I was prepared long ago. I was in full, complete charge o' me father's saw-mill."

The student was nettled, not at the reflection on his own intellectual attainments which this remark seemed to contain, but he felt that in this company he was the representative of modern ideas, of education and enlightenment. The Middle Ages were attacking the Nineteenth Century, and it was his duty to combat the forces of Ignorance. So he removed his briar from his mouth and sent a ring of smoke floating away on the listless air. He watched it intently as it passed out from the shelter of the porch into the great world, and grew broader and bigger and finally disappeared altogether. There was something very impressive in the young man's act. His voice had fallen an octave when he turned to address the Patriarch.

"Had I chosen a saw-mill as my career, I think

I too should have long since been prepared for it. But to fit oneself for work in the world as a lawyer, a doctor, a minister, requires preparation. It takes years of study."

"How many?" asked the Loafer, turning around and eying the student over his knees.

"Well, I'll be twenty-four when I get through studying and become a lawyer."

"Then what'll ye do?"

"I'll work at my profession and make money."

"How long'll ye do that?"

"Why, I don't know particularly—till I have a fair fortune, I suppose."

"How old'll ye be then?"

"Around sixty, I guess."

"Then what'll ye do?"

"What does every man do eventually? Die."

"Then ye've spent all them years learnin' to die, eh? Does a felly go off any easier ef his head is crammed full of algebray or physical g'ography? Mighty souls! Why my pap couldn't 'a' tol' ye ef ye dewided an apple in two halves an' et one how many was left, yit 'hen his time come he jest emptied out his ole pipe, leaned back in his rocker, stretched his feet toward the fire an' went."

"Well, what are you tryin' to prove anyway?" asked the Teacher, who had seated himself on an egg-crate. His furrowed brow, one closed eye and forefinger resting on his chin, showed that he was

struggling hard to catch the thread of the discussion.

"I was jest sayin' that the best life, the sensiblest life, was the slow easy-goin' one, 'hen this young man conterdicted me," said the Loafer.

His air was very condescending and it angered the student. The inquisition just ended had left him in a rather equivocal position, he could see by the way the Patriarch and the Tinsmith nodded their heads.

"You misunderstood me," he said. "You have shown, I see, that from a purely selfish standpoint, ambition is senseless. In the end the man who works hard is no better off than the man who loaf. But remember there is another call—duty."

"That's the idee," cried the Teacher. "The sense of duty moves the world to——"

"Hol' on!" the Loafer exclaimed. "Hol' on! Duty to who?"

"Why, duty to society," the student, answered. "Every man is endowed with certain faculties, and it is his duty to use those faculties to the best of his ability for the advancement of himself and his fellow-man."

"Certainly—certainly," said the pedagogue. "It's the old parable of the talents all over agin."

"Yes, they is some argyment in that," said the Loafer. "Yit they ain't. Pap allus used to say that too many fellys wasspeckilatin' in their talents,

an' 'hen their employer called an accountin' they was only able to pass in a lot o' counterfeit coin."

"But suppose all men sat down and folded their hands and lived as you would have them. What would happen?" asked the college man.

"D'ye see yon pastur' down there?" The Loafer pointed his thumb over his shoulder, indicating the meadow below the bridge, where half a score of cattle were grazing.

The student nodded. The bony forefinger was pointed at him now.

"Well, now s'posin' ye was a hog an'——"

"I object to such a supposition," was the angry retort.

"Well then s'posin', jest fer argyment—ye know ye can s'pose anything 'hen ye argy—s'posin' ye was a cow. Yon fiel' 'll pastur' ten head o' cattle comf'table all summer, 'lowin' they is easy-goin' an' without no ambition. Now you uns gits the high-flyin' idee ye must dewelop your heaven-given faculties fer the benefit o' your sufferin' fellys. The main talent a cow has is that o' eatin'; so ye dewelop it be grazin' night an' day. 'Hen the other cows is friskin' up an' down the meadow or splashin' 'round the creek, you are nibblin' off the choice grass an' digestin' all the turnip tops ye can reach th'oo the holes in the fence. Mebbe you'll git to be a slicker animal, but fer the life o' me, I can't see how you're benefitin' the rest o' the cattle."

"See here," interrupted the Miller, "you are the onsenselessest argyer I ever set eyes on. Ye starts out on edycation an' lands up on cattle-raisin'."

"No—no, you misunderstand him," said the student. "His method of argument is all right, but it seems that the figure is bad. It doesn't quite apply. Every man who leads an industrious, upright life, every man who in so doing prospers and raises himself, does an incalculable service to the community in which he lives. His example inspires others."

"I jedge, then," replied the Loafer, "that this here petickler cow we've ben speakin' of, in eatin' night an' day an' fattenin' itself, is elewatin' the rest o' the cattle be its example. They'll be encouraged to quit sloshin' 'round the creek an' friskin' 'bout the pastur' an' 'll be after grass night an' day, an' the grass'll git skeercer an' they'll take to buttin' one another, an' your efforts at elewatin' 'em ends in turnin' a peaceful pastur' inter a battle-fiel'."

The student sent three rings of smoke whirling from his mouth in rapid succession, but he made no reply.

"Did ye ever hear o' Zebulon Pole?" asked the Loafer.

"I never did. But what has he to do with this matter?"

"Zebulon Pole was a livin' answer to it, he was."

He used to have a shanty up in Buzzard Walley near me an' Pap, an' was young an' full o' all them noble idees. No—he wasn't allus full o' 'em. They hed ben a time 'hen he was easy-goin' an' happy, askin' nawthin' better o' his Maker than a trout stream, a hook an' a line, an' a place to borry a shotgun. All o' a sudden he bloomed out full o' ambition an' high notions. He hed a call. He was wastin' his life loafin' 'long the creeks or settin' day after day on a lawg, whistlin' fer wild turkeys. The world needed Zebulon Pole, an' he answered by comin' out ez candidate fer superwisor. He was elected. From that day the citizens o' our township hed no peace. They'd allus ben used to goin' out on the roads in the spring, stickin' their shovels in the groun', leanin' on 'em an' gittin' paid a dollar a day fer it. The new superwisor was ambitious, an' the good ole system o' makin' roads seemed a thing o' the past. So the boys put their heads together an' concided that a man o' Pole's parts was too good fer his place an' should hev a higher an' nobler job. They made him a school-director, an' leaned on their shovels oncet more an' drawed a dollar a day fer it ez usual.

“Zebulon hed never gone beyant the Third Reader in school or th'oo fractions, an' yit 'hen he become a school-director, he seen the hand o' a higher power instead o' the wotes o' citizens who wasn't agin improvin' the roads, but was

agin hevin' it done 'hen they was workin' out their road tax. He was called to the service o' his felly-man. He was sacrificin' his own happiness, givin' up his fishin' an' huntin' that he might dewote his life to helpin' others. He hedn't ben school-director a month tell he concided it was an honor, a great honor, yit the sphwere was too narrer fer a man o' his talents. Zebulon Pole was learnin'. He'd found out they was better an' higher things in this worl' then a mountain stream full o' trout, a soft bed o' moss on the bank, a half cloudy day, a pipe an' a hook an' line. He'd found out they was nobler things, so he come out ez candidate fer county commissioner, 'lowin' that after that he'd be Gov'nor, an' then Presydent. But the woters remembered how they'd over-exerted themselves in his days ez superwisor; they minded how in his first week ez school-director, he'd changed the spellin' book an' cost 'em twenty-five cents a head fer every blessed child in the district. They jest snowed him under. He was plain Zeb Pole agin. He'd tasted the sweets o' power an' lost his appytite fer fishin'. His hopes o' bein' Presydent was gone. They was nawthin' left fer him to look for'a'd to but dyin'."

The student shook his head gravely.

"There is some argument in what you have been saying," he said slowly. "I admit that. But you know your ideas are not new. You simply carry one back to the Stoics of Greece."

The Loafer was puzzled. "What did you say they was?" he asked.

"The Stoics of Greece. You remind me of the Stoics of Greece."

"Is that a compliment or a name?" The Loafer leaned sharply forward and thrust his long chin toward the speaker ominously.

"Why, a compliment," was the reply. "The Stoics were a great school of philosophers. They taught simplicity in life. Diogenes was a Stoic."

"Who?" asked the Patriarch, bending over and fixing his hand to his ear.

"Diogenes."

"D'ogenes—D'ogenes," said the old man. He paused; then added, "D'ogenes—yes, I've heard the name but I can't exactly place him."

"Well, you certainly never met him," said the collegian. "He lived a couple of thousand years ago in Athens. His idea was to get as close as possible to nature, so he lived in a tub."

"Didn't they hev no suylums in them days?" asked the Loafer.

"Diogenes wasn't crazy," cried the student. "He was a great philosopher. They tell one story of how he went walking around Athens carrying a lantern in broad daylight. When asked what he was doing, he said he was looking for an honest man."

"What was the lantern fer?" the Miller inquired.

"Why, he was looking for an honest man," shouted the collegian.

"I s'pose it never struck him to go to the store fer one," drawled the Loafer.

"You miss the point—the whole of you. Diogenes was a man who spurned the material things of this world. He tried to forget the body in the development of the mind and soul, so he lived in a tub, and——"

"See here, young felly," interrupted the Loafer, "fer an argyer you beat the band. First off ye conterdicted me fer sayin' a man should take his time. Now ye come 'round my way, only worse. I never sayd a man should keep house in a tub. Why, his missus 'ud never give him no peace. No, sir; don't ye git no fool idees like that in your head."

"But that is the truest philosophy——"

"I know. Zebulon Pole got that wery idee after he was defeated fer county commissioner. He moped 'round the walley fer a year an' final one day come to me an' sayd he was goin' to dewote the rest o' his life to religious medytation. 'It's less trouble to git to heaven then the White House,' he sayd, 'fer a good deed is easier to do then an opposin' candidate.' It happened that at this time they hed ben a woman preacher holdin' bush-meetin's in our walley an' he was a reg'lar attendant. She pounded away at wanity. All was wanity, she sayd. They wasn't nawthin'

in this world wuth livin' fer. Fine houses, fine clothes, slick buggies, fast horses, low-cut waistcoats—all them things was extrys which was no more needed fer man's sperritual comfort then napkins fer his bodily nourishment. It didn't take long fer them idees to spread in our walley, an' Pole was one o' the first to catch 'em. I mind comin' home from fishin' one day, I seen him a-settin' on a fence chewin' a straw an' watchin' the clouds scootin' 'long overhead.

“‘Ho, Zeb!’ I sais, shakin' a nice string o' trout under his nose. ‘Why ain't ye out? They's bitin' good.’

“He looks at me ouden the corner o' his eye wery solemn.

“‘Fishin'?’ he sais.

“‘Yes, fishin',’ I yells, kind o' s'prised. ‘They's bitin' good.’

“‘All them things is wanity,’ sais he, straightenin' up an' pintin' a finger o' scorn at me. ‘Wanity o' wanities. Let me warn ye, man. I've give up all them worldly pleasures. I'm set on higher things.’

“‘Six-rail fences,’ I answers, ‘all day long—chewin' a straw—watchin' clouds—wery elewatin'.’

“He give me a sad look.

“‘What are ye doin' now?’ sais I, not intendin' to be put down even ef he hed ben school director.

“‘I'm a lily,’ he sais. ‘I'm followin' the words

o' that dear sister who has cast her lot among us. Henceforth I no longer considers the morrer. I toil not, nuther spin.'

" 'See here, Zeb,' sais I. 'You ain't a bit my idee of a lily.'

" 'I don't ast the approval o' the world,' sais he.

" 'An' ye wouldn't git it ef ye did,' sais I. 'But still I s'pose ye might do pretty well in this new ockypation ef it wasn't fer one thing.'

" 'What's that?' he asts.

" 'Lilies don't use tobacker,' I answers.

" That kind o' jolted him. His eyes opened wide, an' I seen a few tears.

" 'I never thot o' that,' sais he.

" 'Oh, it's unimportant,' sais I. 'You'll make a fair lily. It'll come hard fer ye first off, after your last suit of clothes is wore out. Let's hope that happens in summer so ye'll break in fer winter easier. You'll git used to not eatin',' I sais. 'Eatin' is wanity. An' ez fer tobacker—I never seen a lily smokin'. But still, Zeb, 'hen ye runs out o' cut an' dried, they is allus a placet ye can git a leetle 'hen ye takes a rest from bloomin' in the fiels.'

" That wery night Zebulon 'cepted my inwite an' come over to our placet an' got a handful o' cut an' dried. He borried a loaf o' bread an' a can'le beside. I didn't begrudge it a bit. Nuther did Pap. But this lily business begin spreadin',

an' all o' Hen Jossel's folks tuk to toilin' not nuther spinnin', 'long o' Herman Brewbocker's family an' Widdy Spade an' half a dozen others. They was dependin' on us fer flour, matches, to-backer an' sech wanities, an' it come a leetle hard. We stood it a month but things got goin' from bad to worse. They wasn't a day passed 'thout a lily or two droppin' in at our placet an' 'lowin' mebbe we mightn't like to loan a piece o' ham, a tin o' zulicks or a bit o' oil. It worrit Pap terrible.

"One night I come home from store an' found all the doors locked. The shutters was tight closed an' they was no sign o' life 'cept a leetle bit o' smoke dancin' up an' down on the chimbley top. I give a loud knock. They was no answer. I knocked agin an' yelled. The garret winder slid up an' out come the bawrel o' a gun, then Pap's head.

"'Hello!' sais he. 'Is you a friend or a lily o' the walley?'

"'Pap,' I sais, 'it's your own lovin' son,' sais I. 'Don't leave me out here unprotected, the prey to the next lily that comes along lookin' where-withal he shall borrar.'

"The ole man opened the door an' let me in. Then he locked it agin an' barred it. He picked up his musket wery solemn like an' run the rammer down the bawrel to show it was loaded half way to the muzzle.

"'They was ten lilies here, one after the other,

to-day,' he sais. 'They've left us the bed, the dough-tray, three chairs, a table, an' a few odds an' ends. 'Hen I seen the last foot o' our sausage disappearin' down the road under Widdy Spade's arm I made a wow. The next lily that blooms about this clearin' gits its blossoms blowed off.'

"It didn't take long fer the news o' Pap's wow to fly from one eend of Buzzard Walley to the other. Zeb Pole got a job in the saw-mill. Hen Jossel went back to bark-peelin' an' cuttin' ties. Widdy Spade planted her garden."

"Well," exclaimed the Miller, as the Loafer closed his account of the idiosyncracies of Zebulon Pole, "I can't see any way why your pap was raisin' sech fool things ez lilies. They's only good to look at."

"I understand that all right," said the student. "What I want to know is, what have you demonstrated by all this talk?"

"I ain't demonstratened nawthin'," replied the Loafer. "You conterdicted me because I sayd a man should travel slow an' take things easy in this world, an' I proved that them'ez travels fast is fools, gainin' nawthin' in the eend fer themselves or other folks. Then ye switches right 'round an' advises livin' in a tub. I showed ye what that led to."

"Then are we all to commit suicide?"

"No. Travel comf'table th'oo this world. Travel slow but allus keep movin'. Ye can see

the country ez ye go, stoppin' now an' then to fish trout, or take a bang at a coon, or at the store to discuss a leetle. Don't live too fast—don't live too slow—live mejum."

CHAPTER IX.

Bumbletree's Bass-Horn.

FROM the thick limbs of the maples came the discordant chatter of the cricket, the katydid and the tree-frog; from the creek beyond the mill the hoarse bellow of the bull-frog; from the darkening sky the shrill call of the night-hawk; and out of the woods across the flats the plaintive cry of the whippoorwill and the hoot of the owl. It was the evening chorus, but the loungers on the store porch did not hear it, for to them it was a part of the night's stillness. But when, wafted across the meadows from the hills beyond, the notes of a horn sounded faint and clear, the Chronic Loafer, who for a long time had been smoking his pipe in silence, cried, "What's that?"

"Slatter up the Dingdang," said the Store-keeper. He was sitting on the steps.

"No, it ain't; it's Nellie Grey," said the School Teacher in a voice that brooked no contradiction. Then in a deep bass he began singing,

"Oh, me little Nellie Grey, they have taken her away,
An' I'll never see me darlin' any more,
I'm a-settin' be the river with——"

"You're a-settin' on my porch," cried the Storekeeper, for he was nettled at having had his knowledge of music questioned. "Sam Butter can't blow that tune, an' he has ben out every night a-practisin' 'Slatter up the Dingdang!'"

The music on the hill ceased, leaving no tangible ground on which the debate could be continued. The Chronic Loafer had too long been the butt of the pedagogue's cutting sarcasm to miss this opportunity of scoring him.

"Ef that ain't a good un," he roared. "Why, you uns doesn't know nawthin' 'bout tunes, Teacher. Jim Clock he was een last night an' hear Sam a-blowin' that wery piece. He sayd it was 'Slatter up the Dingdang,' an' I conjure that Jim knows, fer he is 'bout the best bass-horn player they is."

The Storekeeper feared that this support from the Loafer might somewhat prejudice his own case in the minds of the others, so he ventured, "Not the best they is."

"Well, the best they is in Pennsylvany," said the Loafer.

"There are some ignoramuses don't know nothin'," exclaimed the Teacher. It was dark, but by the light of the lantern that hung in the window the men could see that he was gazing

meaningly at his adversary. "But I know some that knows less than nothin'. The best horn-blower they is! Why, where's your Rubensteins, your Paddyrewskies, your Pattis?"

He stopped, for he saw that the mention of these names had had the desired effect on his audience, as there was a wise wagging of heads.

But the Loafer was irrepressible. "Why," he retorted, "Patti ain't a horn-player. He's a singer. I was readin' a piece in the paper 'bout him jest last week. An' ez fer ole Rube Stein, he never played nawthin' but checkers."

"Well, can't a man both sing an' play the horn?" the Teacher snapped.

"Perfessor, I agree with ye, I agree with ye entirely." The Tinsmith had been silent hitherto, on the end of the bench. Now he leaned into view, resting an elbow on his knee and supporting his head with his hand. "Jim Clock don't know no more 'bout blowin' a bass-horn then my ole friend, Borax Bumbletree. Borax he knowd jest that leetle he was fired outen the Kishiko-quillas In'epen'en' Ban'. He come of a musical fam'ly, too. His mother an' pap use to play the prettiest kind o' duets on the melodium an' 'cordinate. His sister Amandy Lucy an' his brother Hiram could sing like nightingales an' b'longed to the choir at Happy Grove Church. It seems like Borax was left out in the distributin' o' music

in that fam'ly, an' consequent it went hard with him. 'Henever strangers was at the house it was allus, 'Mr. Bumbletree, do play the melodium,' or, 'Now, Amanda Lucy, sing one o' your beautiful pieces,' an' all that. Poor Borax, he jest set an' moped.

"Final he 'lowed he'd give the fam'ly a s'prise an' learn the bass-horn, cal'latin' to make up be hard hustlin' what he'd missed be natur'—the knowledge of the dif'rence 'tween a sharp an' a flat, a note an' a bar, a treble an' a soprany, an' all them things. He begin be j'inin' the In'pen'en' Ban'. Fer six weeks he practised hard, an' at last he did git to playin' a couple o' pieces. But the other fellys in the ban' was continual' complainin' that Borax didn't keep no kind o' time; an' not only that, but he drowned 'em all out, fer he could make a heap o' noise. They sayd they wouldn't play with him no more tell he learned to blow time. Borax was clean discouraged, but he didn't give up. He practised six weeks more an' tried it with the ban' boys agin. They sayd now that he didn't know pitch an' ruined their pieces a-bellerin' way down in *A* 'hen they was blowin' up in high *C*. He was pretty well cut up, but 'lowed he'd quit.

"I think he meant what he sayd an' 'ud 'a kep' his promise ef it hedn't 'a' ben that a woman interfered with his good intentions. She was Pet Parsley—Widdy Parsley, who lived with her

mother back in Buzzard Walley. Borax hed a shine fer her afore she merried, an' after she become a widdy he was wus 'an ever. One night at a ban' festival, 'hen she was standin' sellin' at the ice-crim counter, he was a-jollyin' her. Now he noticed that young Bill Hooker, who'd tuk his place in the ban', was makin' eyes at her over the top o' his bass-horn while he was playin'. That near drove Bumbletree mad, fer him an' Bill hed ben runnin' neck an' neck, an' he knowd they was approachin' the string.

" 'Don't Mr. Hooker play gran'?' sais Pet kind o' timid like.

" 'Well, I don't know,' answers Borax, 'I've heerd better.'

" 'Oh, hev ye,' sais she, kind o' perkin' up her nose. 'I 'low you're jealous. Can you play at all?'

" 'Well, can I?' sais Borax. 'Why, I can blow all 'round him.'

" 'I'd like to hear you,' sais Pet. 'Won't you come an' blow fer me sometim'?'

" 'I will,' he answers, verry determined.

" He went home that night bound to git time an' pitch together. He started to practise 'round the house but his fam'ly objected. The missus 'lowed she could never play the 'cordine with sech a bellerin' goin' on. Amandy Lucy went so fur ez to say it 'ud ruin her voice. But that didn't stop Borax. He sayd he'd practise 'way from

the house. Every night after the feedin' was done he use to take his horn, his music marks an' a lantern, an' go out on the hill ahint the barn. There, settin' on a lawg, with the lantern hangin' on a saplin', he'd blow away. Many a night that summer ez I set over at our placet on the next ridge, I'd hear Borax a boom-boom-boomin' to git the time. The big tones 'ud go echoin' way over in the mo'ntain. Oncet in a while he'd hit it good, an' I tell you uns it sounded pretty to hear them notes a-rollin' deep acrosst the gut, a-sighin' th'oo the trees an' a-dyin' way off in the woods.

"Then he tuk up pitch. He blowed pitch fer a week an' then tried pitch an' time together. I thot he was doin' pretty well. Still them ban' boys wasn't satisfied. They sayd he didn't go up an' down right, an' that they couldn't hev him a-blowin' 'way at pitch an' time an' never makin' no new notes. He 'lowed to me that they was a heap to learn 'bout blowin' a bass-horn, but he was goin' to git it ef it 'ud only be of uset in the next worl'.

"At nights I could see his light a-twinklin' in the woods acrosst the gut an' hear him tryin' to blow time an' pitch an' ups an' downs all at oncet. He'd git his wind fixed to blow *A*, an' out 'ud come a *C*; or he'd try fer a *D* an' land an *E*. He 'lowed to me oncet that sometim' he thot

mebbe it was willed that he was never to git a tune. But he kep' at it.

"Now Bill Hooker hed ben to Horrisburg that summer an' got him a brown cady hat. That was a new kind o' headgear 'round Kishikoquillas an' it cot on wonderful well. All the boys 'lowed they'd git 'em, but tell they had a chancet o' buyin' one they got to depend on Bill fer the loan o' hisn 'hen they was goin' out shinin'. So Hooker wasn't s'prised one night 'hen Borax Bumbletree drove up to his placet an' 'lowed mebbe Hooker mightn't like to loan him his cady, ez he was goin' callin'. Bill allus was obligin' an' thot no harm 'hen he watched Borax a-drivin' away with his cady settin' way up on top o' his head. Bumbletree hitched his buckboard to a saplin' on the edge o' Pet Parsley's clearin'. Then he got his horn out from in under the seat, fixed himself on a stump 'bout fifty feet from the house, put up his music marks so the moonlight shone on 'em, an' begin to play. He started the serynade with 'Soft th'oo the Eventide,' that bein' sentymantal an' his most famil'ar piece. He put his whole heart into the work an' was soon blowin' time an' pitch an' ups an' downs all at oncet. The lamp that hed ben settin' in the windy went out—that was all to show he'd ben heard. He blowed 'Pull fer the Shore, Sailor.' No sign o' life in the house. He blowed 'The Star Spangled Banner.' Still no sign. He then

begin all over agin with 'Soft th'oo the Even-tide.' Be this time the whole chicken-house hed j'ined in, an' the cows was takin' a hand too. He was desp'rit, dissypinted fearful an' all used up. So he went home.

"You take a reg'lar thief. He knows they's only one eend to thievin'—jail. An' he'll keep on stealin' tell he gits there. Take a reg'lar murderer. He knows they's only one eend to murder—the galluses; yit he'll continyer murderin' tell he gits there. So it is with a reg'lar man. He knows they's only one result o' bein' in lawv—to be merried or git the mitten. An' yit he'll keep right on tell he gits one or the other. So it was with Borax Bumbletree. He hed no reason to think he'd git anything but the mitten, yit he went right up to Pet Parsley's next night to take his punishment. He tol' me that day that he guesst his serynade hed spoiled all the chancet he ever had, but he wanted it over.

"So he was kind o' sheepish an' hang-dog 'hen he'd sayd good evenin' to the widdy an' set down melancholy like, on the wood-box. They was quiet a piecet.

"Then he sayd, 'I hear ye hed some music up here last night.'

"He was jest fishin'.

"'Did I!' sais she, flarin' up. 'Well, I guesst I did. An' the chickens was so stirred up they kep' on all night an' not a wink o' sleep did we

git in this house. I never heerd sech bass-horn blowin'.'

"Borax jest hung his head an' shuffled his feet.

"The widdy spoke up agin. 'Does you ever see Bill Hooker?'

"'Oncet in a long while,' Borax answers.

"'Well, you tell him,' she sais, 'that next time he comes up here to serynade me to send notice so I can git over the other side the mo'ntain.'

"Borax Bumbletree gasped an' almost fell offen the woodbox.

"'How'd you know it was Bill Hooker?' he asts quick.

"'Well, didn't I see that new fandangled hat o' hisn—that cady I've heerd so much about. Why, I'd 'a' knowd him a mile.'

"Now Borax wasn't ez slow on everything ez he was on music. He was right smart, he was. He seen the way the wind blowed.

"Gittin' offen the wood-box he went over to the settee alongside o' her.

"'Pet,' he sais, 'I allus told you Bill Hooker couldn't blow the bass-horn.'

"'I otter 'a' knowd you could blow a heap sight better,' she sais quiet like, but meanin' business.

"'That I can,' sais he. 'An' after we're merried—not tell after, mind ye—I'll blow sech music fer ye ez ye never dreamed of.'"

“ My sights, but he was innercent ! ” the Loafer cried.

“ What do you know 'bout it ? ” snapped the Tinsmith.

“ Why, him thinkin' she'd give him a chancet to blow.”

CHAPTER X.

Little Si Berrybush.

THE Chronic Loafer held in his hand a single sheet of a Philadelphia paper nine days old. The other pages had long since left the store in service as wrappings. This treasure he had rescued from such ignominious use and now was poring over it letter by letter. The center of the page was within three inches of the end of his nose. His brow was furrowed and his lips moved. At intervals he lifted his right hand and with the forefinger beat time to his reading. He was comfortably fixed on an egg-crate close by the stove. The paper hid him from the view of his companions. They could not see the earnest workings of his features but they could hear a steady, sonorous mumble and were curious. They knew better than to interrupt him in his arduous task, however, and awaited with commendable patience the time when he should choose to come forth from his seclusion and tell them all about it.

They had not long to wait. Suddenly he

jerked his head forward three times, viciously butting the paper, simultaneously emitting a burring sound not unlike that of an angry bull when he tears up the sod with his horns. The curtain fell to show him calm again but with a puzzled expression on his countenance.

"Teacher," he said, "what does *h-a-b-e-a-s* spell?"

"Hab-by-ace," replied the pedagogue promptly. He threw out his chest and fixed his thumbs in their favorite resting-place, the arm-holes of his waistcoat. His attitude was that of a man who was full to the neck with general information and only needed uncorking.

"Habbyace," said the Loafer. "Habbyace—habbyace—that's a new un on me."

"Doubtless it is," the other retorted, "if you have never studied Latin. It means *have*."

"Have—have," muttered the Loafer, more puzzled than ever. "Then what's *c-o-r-p-u-s* spell?"

"Corpuse," replied the pedagogue, "being the Latin for body."

"Then I'm stumped." The Loafer crumpled up his paper in one hand and shook the other at the assembled company. "Them ceety lawyers certainly beat the band."

"What's all the trouble now?" inquired the Tinsmith.

The Loafer unfolded the sheet again and

smoothed it out on his knees. Then he leaned over it and eyed it intently.

"I was jest readin' a piece about a man called Jawhn O'Brien," he said slowly. "He was 'rested fer killin' his wife an' two young uns. It sais the evydence is dead agin him an' he is sure to hang. He has hired J. Montgomery Cole to defend him. The first thing the lawyer does is to go inter court an' ast fer a habbyace corpuse. Mighty souls! The idee! How's that to defend a man—jest to ast fer his dead body."

The Patriarch shook his head solemnly. "Terrible—terrible," he said. "Sech men ought never git diplomys."

"Yit, Gran'pap," suggested the Tinsmith, "don't ye think after all it's best they is some sech lawyers? Why, ef it wasn't fer the dumb lawyers they'd never be no murderers brought to jestice."

"True—true," said the old man. "Now it used to be that 'hen a man committed murder he was tried, an' ef the evydence was agin him, he was hung. Nowadays a felly commits murder an' a year is spent hevin' him indickted. After he's indickted a year is ockypied with these habbyace corpuse proceedin's. They settles who gits the body in caset he's hung an' then they finds what they calls a 'flaw in the indicktment.' They indickts him agin. Next comes the question of a 'change in vendue.' It takes a year to argy that pint an' after it the trial begins. Ef he's found

innercent it means he's ben livin' th'ee years doin' nawthin' at the county's expense. Ef he's found guilty his lawyer takes what they calls an 'exception,' meanin' he objects to him bein' hung. It takes a year to——"

"But, Gran'pap," interrupted the Loafer, "ye must remember that the principle o' the law is that because a man commits murder is no sign he's guilty."

"I know—I know," the Patriarch said. "Ye can't catch me on law. I thot o' stedyin' it oncet. But ez I was sayin'—where was it I left off?"

"What's a 'change o' vendue,' Gran'pap?" inquired the Miller.

The old man glared at the speaker.

"That wasn't the pint where I left off," he snapped.

"Yes, but what is it, Gran'pap?" the Tinsmith asked.

But the Patriarch had forgotten all about the defects of the law. He had leaned forward, resting his hands on his cane and his head on his hands, and was studying the floor intently.

"Buttonporgie stood six feet two in his stock-in's," he said half aloud, after a long silence. "That there was the way to do 'em. Now ef Si Berrybush hed ben livin' to-day, he'd be fussin' with indicktments an' changes of vendues an' all them things an'——"

"Who air you talkin' to now?" exclaimed the Loafer.

The old man looked up. "Oh!" he said. "I forgot. Sure, I forgot. Ye never heard o' Tom Buttonporgie did ye, or Si Berrybush?"

None of the company had heard of the pair, so the Patriarch consented to enlighten them.

"I got the main pints o' the story from Tom himself," he began. "He used to tell it 'hen he stayed at my pap's place 'hen I was a bit of a boy. He allus told it the same way, too, which was evydence of it bein' true. I wish all you uns could 'a' heard him. Mighty, but it was a treat! Why, he was never in our house two minutes till us children was runnin' 'round him callin' to him to tell us how he done Si Berrybush. But he'd never give us a word till he'd opened his pedler's pack an' sold somethin' to Ma an' the girls. Next it was his supper an' a pipe. Then I'd climb on his one knee an' my sister Solly on the other. Ed an' May 'ud git on the wood-box an' Pap an' Ma on the settee. It took th'ee pipes to wind Tom up. Then he'd go beautiful. The words 'ud role out like music an' you'd fergit the kitchen an' the folks around. You'd be out in the woods with him, steppin' along with him hour after hour ez he was carryin' Si Berrybush to freedom. You'd see the things ez he saw, an' you'd feel the things ez he felt. Now ye was low down an' discouraged. Everything was

dark ez ye stumbled on an' on, achin' in every limb, expectin' each minute 'ud be your last. Now ye was hopin'. They was a chance fer ye yit. The light broke. The load was gone. Si Berrybush was gone, an' ye was back in the ole kitchen agin, with Pap an' Ma sound asleep on the settee.

"Ez I was sayin', Tom Buttonporgie stood six feet two in his stockin's an' was a most powerful man, fer walkin' day after day, luggin' a great pack on his back, hed give him the muscles of an ox. He used to come to this walley oncet every summer so he knowd well o' Si Berrybush, who was the desperatest man ever seen in these parts. Si's okypation was robbin'. He made his headquarters in the mo'ntain acrosst the river. His hand was agin everybody an' everybody knowd it, yit he never was catched. Oncet a pedler was found dead in the bushes with a bullet hole in his head an' his pack turned inside out. They sayd Berrybush did it, so he went down to the Sheriff's an' give himself up. They was no evydence an' he walked home agin. A couple o' times things like that happened an' yit they was never an ioty o' proof. He'd 'a' died a nat'ral death, I guess, ef he hedn't forgot himself one night in the willage an' shot Joe Hyde. They was too many fellys handy who hed grudges agin him to let him git away, an' they clapped him in jail, tried him an' sentenced him to be hung.

"Now, about this time, Tom Buttonporgie come over the mo'ntain inter the walley. Late in the afternoon he reached Ben Clock's place near Eden, an' ez they knowd him well they ast him to spend the night. After supper the family hed a game o' cards an' about nine o'clock Tom tuk up his pack an' started fer the barn where he was to sleep, fer the house was full. Clock lighted the way with a lantern an' saw him comfortable fixed. The pack was stowed away in a corner o' the barn-floor, while the pedler was settled nice ez ye please on a horse-blanket in the hay-mow.

"Tom Buttonporgie slept sound an' hard. Everything in this world was pleasant fer him. Things was goin' his way. It's strange that it should be so, boys, but yit it is true that sleep comes easiest an' quickest to them ez hes nawthin' but good things to forget in it. So from the time he laid his head down on the hay till a kick awoke him, Tom knowd nawthin'. He opened his eyes with a jerk an' set up an' rubbed 'em. The airly mornin' light was jest creepin' inter the barn, but he could make out only a small, dark figure a few feet away.

"'Good morning, Mr. Clock,' sais he wery pleasant, tho' he was a leetle put out at the rough way he'd ben woke.

"'Good mornin', Tom,' sais the figure wery cheerful. 'You've mistook me, fer my name is Berrybush.'

"'Hen the pedler hear that he made a grab fer his pistol. He'd laid it in the hay close to him, but now it was gone. He started to rise but he felt a steel bawrel pressed agin his head. Buttonporgie was big an' full o' grit, but he knowd that ye can't argy with lead. So he set down.

" 'Well,' sais he, 'I guess you've got me, Mr. Berrybush.'

" 'I think I hev,' the murderer answers, 'an' I've got ye good,' he sais. 'I intend to keep ye, too, fer I'm right fresh out o' jail an' soon the whole country'll be lookin' fer me. Excuse the familiarity,' he goes on polite like, 'but we'll be Tom an' Si fer some hours to come, fer you're to carry me outen these parts in your pack.'

" That idee made Buttonporgie gasp. He tried to git up but bumped agin the pistol.

" Si Berrybush laughed an' went on in that pleasant way o' his: 'I notice the plan ain't takin' well with ye, Tom, but you'll see how nice it works. While you slept,' he sais, 'I fixed the pack. The goods is all stowed away here in the hay an' I find I fit the leather box to a T. I git in it; you put it on your back an' go th'ee mile an hour. Nawthin's easier.'

" Then he laughed like he'd die.

" Be this time they was quite some light in the barn an' the pedler was able to see who he hed to deal with. The first sight was encouragin', fer he was but a bit of a man, not more than five

feet th'ee. He'd a verry small body set on crooked spindle legs. His face was pleasant enough, fer they was nawthin' in his leetle, black eyes an' heavy, red beard to mark him ez a desperaydo. The only real onlikely thing about him was the pedler's pistol.

"Tom kind o' cheers up now an' sais, sais he, 'Si, you've mistook the whole thing. Don't ye see I'll turn ye over to the first men we meet?'

"At that Si th'owed back his head an' laughed.

"'Will ye?' he sais. 'Well I guess ye would, only this pistol'll be stickin' th'oo a hole in the back o' the pack. Ef you go to carry out sech an idee two bullets'll end the both of us, an' that's a sight better than hangin'. So come on,' he sais. 'We must be movin'.'

"Tom wasn't in fer undertakin' sech a job without objectin'.

"'See here, Si!' he sais. 'I appeals to you ez a gentleman,' he sais. 'I've allus heard you was a gentleman in spite o' your faults—I appeal to you to tell me what good it would do you to kill yourself an' me too. You hain't no particular spite agin me,' Tom goes on, 'an' I hain't no particular spite agin you. I'm willin' fer you to stay in this barn an' me git out, or fer you to git out an' me stay, both of us keepin' quiet.'

"Si's eyes kind o' twinkled an' he pulled his beard like he was thinkin' wery hard.

"'Shake me, Tom!' he sais at last, 'ef I don't

like a man o' your sperrit. Ef I wasn't in sech a bad hole I'd be tempted to accept your offer. But onfortunate fer both of us,' he sais, 'this whole walley will be overrun with searchin' parties in a few hours. They've got a chancet to hang Si Berrybush an' they ain't goin' to lose it ef they can help it.'

"Buttonporgie was a nice man an' a smart man at his business, but they was some things that it was a leetle hard to git into his head.

"'See here!' he sais, not satisfied. 'I can't see what good it 'ud do you to shoot me ef I was to call one o' them searchin' parties to take a look in my pack. You'd hev to hang anyway. Why couldn't ye jest shoot yourself?'

"'You're wastin' wable time,' Si answers. 'I'll kill myself sooner than be catched. Ez long ez you know that you'll be killed ef I am catched, you won't bother callin' folks to see what you are carryin'. An', Tom,' he went on, 'I might jest ez well tell you now that 'hen we git well out o' harm's way, I'm goin' to shoot ye anyhow. I don't want to leave no one 'round to blab.'

"Si Berrybush smiled the innercentest smile you uns ever see, an' the pedler chewed a straw a spell.

"Then he looks up an' sais, 'You must take me for a dummy?'

"'Why?' Si asts.

"'Do you think I'll lug you thirty or forty

mile jest so you can shoot me?' answers Button-porgie. 'I might ez well call it up now!' he sais.

"Si cocked his pistol careless-like an' pinte it at the other man's head ez tho' it was his finger an' he was jest makin' a good argyment on religion.

" 'You are a dummy,' he sais, laughin'. 'Now don't you s'pose that ez long ez you think there's hope, a chancet o' your comin' out alive, you'll carry me. Of course ye will,' he sais. 'Not till there's not an ioty of a possibility o' your doin' me, will you let me finish you.'"

"Mighty souls, but that Si was an argyer, now wasn't he!" the Miller interrupted.

"He'd 'a' looked like small potatys 'long side o' my Missus. I mind the 'time 'hen jest fer fun I——"

The Patriarch tapped the Loafer gently on the knee with his cane.

"My dear man," he said gently, "never interrupt a good story. It ain't polite. There is some peculiarly minded folks ez is never happy 'less they is doin' all the talkin'. Now where did I leave off?"

"Where there was hope—some hope," the Miller answered.

"Hope—oh, yes—hope," the old man continued. "Mighty! Why I've knowd a sensible hen to set four weeks on a chiny egg, jest in hope that she might be mistaken. Si Berrybush knowd human

natur' well, fer it didn't need but a wiggle or two o' the pistol to bring Buttonporgie to takin' his view o' the sensibleness o' hopin'. The pedler looked kind o' sheepish an' 'lowed he guesst Si was right. Si sayd he guesst he was, an' climbed into the pack, an' most mighty snug he fit it. Then Buttonporgie knelt down, put his arms th'oo the straps an' lifted the load high on his back. Si closed down the flap. A second later Tom felt the muzzle o' the pistol pressin' him gentle like atween the shoulders.

" 'Now we're off,' sais Si, 'over the mo'ntains th'oo Windy Gap. Step light, ole hoss,' he sais, 'fer the gun's cocked an' too much joltin'll send it off.' "

" Mighty souls! " interrupted the Loafer. " An' how fur did he hev to carry him, Gran'-pap? A mile? "

" A mile! " exclaimed the Patriarch. " Pshaw! Does you uns think a mile 'ud 'a' put Si Berrybush outen the way o' the sheriff's posse. Why, the whole county was alive that mornin'. It was hardly sun-up 'hen Tom Buttonporgie stepped outen Clock's barn an' went ploddin' up the big road with his pack, yit at the eend o' the first mile he met th'ee men on horseback, an' they pulled up an' told him all about Berrybush an' warned him to keep out a sharp eye. Tom felt the pistol bawrel kind o' nosin' 'round his shoulders, so he laughed wery pleasant an' 'lowed

it was all right; he was obliged fer the warnin' but there was no help fer Si Berrybush ef he ever come within the length o' his arm. On he went agin. Ez the last o' the horses' hoofs died away down the road he hear a gentle chucklin' coming from his pack.

" 'Wery good,' sais Si, 'most a mighty good.'

"The pedler was a religious man yit he swore. At that he could feel his pack palpitatin', fer his load was laughin' an' laughin' to beat all. Tom swore some more, but he kept up his walkin'.

"Si 'lowed it wasn't nice fer Tom to carry on so.

" 'It makes me feel bad,' he sayd, talkin' th'oo a slit in the top o' the pack. 'It makes me feel bad, Tom, to hear you behavin' like that. I don't mind killin' a good man, fer I knows he'll git his reward in the next world. But shootin' a felly after he's used sech language hurts me,' he sayd.

"With that he rubbed the nose o' the pistol between Tom's shoulder-blades. The pedler jest bubbled.

" 'Keep on hopin', Tom,' he heard the voice at his back. 'Mebbe somethin'll happen 'twixt now an' to-morrow mornin' that'll let you free o' your pack!'

"The sun come out hot, an' the road was dusty. The load was heavy an' they was a good many long hills. Time an' agin Tom 'ud slow down. 'Git up, ole hoss,' he'd hear come from

behind him. Then they'd be that pistol jabbin' him. He'd make a face an' pick up his gait. Time an' agin he met parties ez was out huntin' the murderer. Sometim's he'd hurry by them; others he stopped an' talked to, askin' all about Si Berrybush an' his escape, thankin' 'em fer their advice an' 'lowin' over an' over agin he'd give his last cent jest to have the leetle man in his grasp.

"Be noon he'd covered nine mile an' reached the foot o' the mo'ntain.

" 'Now see here, Si,' he sais, sais he, 'you ain't goin' to kill your horse be overwork, are ye? S'posn I drop down in the road!'

" 'Nobody's sorrier than I am fer your trouble, Tom,' come the answer. 'It's really pitiful. But I'll risk your givin' out—I'll risk it.'

"Then there was the pistol agin.

"At the last house in the walley Tom stopped an' got a loaf o' bread be special permission. The woman wanted to hev a look at his pack, but he sayd no; what he had in it wasn't worth lookin' at. He was carryin' low-down, mean, mis'able stock that wasn't fit to show to no lady. Besides—the pistol was jabbin' him—he hed to hurry on to git over the mo'ntain be sunset. An' on he went.

"Si begin laughin' so hard it set the pack joltin' up an' down on Tom's back an' almost upset him.

" 'That was a mean undercut you give me,

Thomas,' sais the murderer. 'A gentleman should never abuse a gentleman behind his back!' he sais. 'Now s'posn you pass that bread in here.'

" 'But I got it fer meself,' Tom ventures.

" 'Did ye?' answers Berrybush, pressin' on the butt of the gun jest a leetle. 'Well, s'posn ye pass it in anyway an' dewote the rest o' the afternoon to hopin'. Mebbe you'll git it after all.'

" Tom passed it.

" The road was steep an' the way was rough in the mo'ntain. Strong ez he was an' light ez was the murderer, the work begin to go heavy with him. But the pistol was allus at his back proddin' him on. Oncet he stepped inter a chuckhole an' pitched for'a'd, his hands jest savin' him from strikin' his face to the ground. He thot that all was up with him, fer the pack was jerked up on his head, wrenchin' his shoulders most dreadful. He closed his eyes, expectin' to hear the crack o' the gun an' then go plungin' on agin fer ever an' ever.

" Nawthin' happened. He climbed to his feet kind o' dissypinted, fer instead o' his journey bein' ended he hed to go limpin' ahead. Si was a-cursin' him dreadful. Tom walked like an ellyphant, he sayd, an' was joltin' his bones all out o' j'int. Next time he stumbled the gun 'ud be cocked dead sure.

" The sun was settin' 'hen they reached the edge o' the woods on yon side the mo'ntain. The

murderer pushed up the lid o' the pack an' looked out over Tom's shoulder. He pintoed across the wally twenty mile to where they could see the hills agin. There, he sayd, he'd be th'oo with his mule.

"Th'oo with him! Tom knowd what that meant. He knowd now Si Berrybush 'ud keep his word; that he'd never git out o' that pack an' leave a man alive an' runnin' round to tell where he could be found. He was almost willin' to call the game up right there an' lay down his load an' his life together, but still there was hope. It was precious leetle, to be sure, but still some. Ez Si sayd, they was no tellin' what might happen agin they got to the end o' that twenty mile.

"Berrybush pulled in his head an' let the flap down over it. 'Git up', he sais, 'git up, ole Tom.' An' with that he give him a prod.

"On Buttonporgie went, down the slope inter the wally, each step takin' him nearer an' nearer the hills. The sun set an' the darkness come to add to his troubles. The lights went out in the houses 'long the way an' they wasn't no sound to cheer him up, not a sound but the steady breathin' in his pack an' the rattle o' the gravel under his own shufflin' feet. It was awful travellin' that way, straight on an' on to the hills where he was to die, feelin' allus on his back the weight o' the man who was to kill him.

"Final he couldn't stand the silence no more. 'Si,' he cried, 'Si, won't ye talk to me!'

"They wasn't no answer. He only heard a heavy breathin' in the pack.

"The moon come up an' lighted the road an' the dogs begin to bay at it. That might 'a' cheered him up some had he 'a' heard 'em, but he didn't hear nawthin' now. Tom Buttonporgie was dazed like. He kept on a-walkin' an' a-walkin', but the straps no longer cut his shoulders an' he forgot the load on his back. The road with the moonlight pourin' over it seemed like a broad white pavement crosst the walley, smooz ez marble. They was no chuckholes now to stumble in, no thank-ye-ma'ams to jump over, no ruts to twist his ankles. It was all smooz—smooz ez marble it was. On he went, faster an' faster. He wanted to git to the eend o' the white road now an' lay down his pack an' sleep. He was walkin' mechanical.

"All o' a sudden a queer sound woke him from his doze an' he stopped short. It all come back agin. He was in the road an' the road was rough, an' the straps was cuttin' dreadful, an' his legs felt like they was givin' way under him. The pack was on his back an' awful heavy too. He reached up his hand an' felt it. But a queer sound was comin' from it—most a mighty queer. Tom didn't dast breathe. He stood still listenin'. Then it come louder—a soft purrin', gentle ez a

cat's. An' the peddler laughed. Natur' hed tackled Si Berrybush an' walloped him. He was snorin'.

"There was an oneasy movement in the pack. Tom's heart fell. He stepped on wery cautious. Now agin come the sound, louder an' louder.

"The road took a sudden turn 'round a thick clump o' woods an' crossed a stream on a rickety timber bridge. There Buttonporgie stopped. An' ez he leaned agin the rail an' looked down into the water there below him, gleamin' along in the moonlight, everything kind o' passed away from his mind. He only knowd that he was wery hot, an' the pool looked so cool an' in-witin'. He only knowd that he was wery tired, an' the pool looked so soft an' nice, ez ef it was jest intended for limbs achin' like ez his. He'd miles yit to go afore he reached the hills. Si was sleepin'. Si wouldn't mind. Si wouldn't know. They'd be movin' agin afore Si woke up. So he climbed over the rail an' stepped off. The wotter closed over his head an' he went down an' down, the great weight on his back draggin' him. But that wasn't what he wanted. He was jest goin' to lay there in the cool stream an' look up at the stars an' rest. His feet struck the bottom an' he tore his arms free o' the straps that held the awful weight to him. In a second he was on the surface an' swimmin', fer he was wide awake.

" He used to say that ez he stood there on the bank lookin' at that quiet pool it seemed ez tho' it was all a dream ; that he'd never met the murderer an' carried him thirty mile on his back, or felt the prod of his pistol every time his steps lagged. But ef it was a dream, he thot, then what was that he seen that rose to the surface an' went bobbin' away on the current? It was Si Berrybush's ole cloth cap."

CHAPTER XI.

Cupia ana a Mule.

THE wind went shrieking through the bare attic above and singing among the boxes and barrels in the cellar below. The big show window in front groaned in a deep bass ; the little window in the rear accompanied it in a high treble. The lamp, with its vague, flickering flame, cast a gloomy glare over the store, and lighted up the faces of the little group of men, seated on box, counter, keg and chair, huddled about the great center of heat.

The Chronic Loafer raised himself from his favorite pile of calicoes and turned up his coat collar.

"Shet that stove door an' put on the draught," he cried. "What's the uset o' freezin'!"

"Cold Chrisermas to-morrer," said the Store-keeper, as he banged the door shut and turned on the draught in obedience to the demand.

"Turn up the lamp," growled the Miller. "It's ez dark an' gloomy ez a barn here."

"They ain't no uset o' wastin' ile," the Store-

keeper muttered as he complied with the second request.

The great egg stove roared right merrily as the flames darted up out of its heart, until its large body grew red-hot and sent forth genial rays of heat and light—the veritable sun of the narrow village universe.

“Listen to the wind! Ain’t it howlin’?” said the Loafer.

“Col’est Chrismas Eve in years,” the Tin-smith responded.

The Loafer pushed himself off the counter onto an empty crate that stood below him. He leaned forward and almost embraced the stove in his effort to toast his hands.

“This, I’ve heard tell,” he said, “is the one night in all the year ’hen the cattle talks jest like men.”

“Some sais it’s Holly E’en,” ventured the Miller.

“No, it ain’t. It’s Chrismas,” the Loafer replied emphatically. He leaned back, placed his thumbs in the arm-holes of his waistcoat and glared about the circle in defiance.

The brief silence that followed was broken by the School Teacher.

“Superstition! Mere superstition!”

“That’s what I sais,” cried the Storekeeper. He was leaning over the counter munching a candy lion. “What ’ud a mule talk about ’hen he only had a chancet oncet a year?”

A thin, meaning smile crept over the Loafer's face and he bent forward, thrusting his long chin in the direction of the venturesome merchant.

"In my time," he drawled, "I've met some mules pullin' plows that hed they ben able to talk 'ud 'a' sayd sensibler things then some ez is engaged in easier an' more money-makin' ockypations."

The Store was usually loath to accord recognition to the Loafer, but this was the season of good-will to all, and it lifted up its voice in one mighty guffaw. Even the Teacher joined in, and the G. A. R. Man slapped his knee and cried, "Good shot!"

The victim hid his burning face in the recesses of the sugar barrel, and under pretense of hunting for the scoop finished the candy toy.

"My father-in-law was a superstitious man and always believed in them fool things," said the pedagogue. "I never give them any credit myself, for they say that education is as great an enemy to superstition as light is to darkness. In other words, learnin' illumines a man's mind and drives out all them black, unholy beliefs that are bred in ignorance."

He paused to give effect to his words, but the Loafer seized the opportunity, thus unintentionally offered, to remark, "Then it 'ud seem like most men's brains is like cellars. They is allus some hole or corner in a cellar that ye can't light lest ye put

a special lantern in it, an' ye hev trouble keepin' that burnin'."

"But the brain's perfectly round," interposed the Miller, shaking his head sagely.

The Teacher sighed. "It's no use talking to you men in figures——"

"Go on. Let's hev figgers," cried the Storekeeper, eagerly.

The pedagogue leaned back on two legs of his chair and pillowed his head on a cheese box that stood on the counter. After having carefully extinguished the flame in his cigar, blown out the smoke and placed the stump in his pocket, he began:

"While I give no credit to the current superstitions, I cherish a peculiar affection for this old belief that the cattle talk on Christmas Eve. I feel that to it I owe part of my happiness in life, and I've had a good deal of it, too, in spite of the hardships I had to endure as a boy. You know my parents died when I was but seventeen year old and left me practically penniless and a charge on the township. So I was bound over to Abraham Bittenberger, who had a fine farm up near West Eden. But for one thing life with him would have gone hard with me, for he was a crotchety old fellow, a bit stingy, and inclined to get the greatest possible amount of work out of a husky lad that was gettin' no pay but his keep. The one thing I mentioned was Abraham's dotter

Kate. I have seen many weemen in my day, and I can honestly say that I have looked on few such pictures as she was when I first knew her. She was sixteen then——”

“I don’t know ’bout that,” the Loafer interrupted. “Did you uns ever see my Missus ’hen she was sixteen an’——”

“She was sixteen then,” repeated the Teacher, ignoring the remark; “she was sixteen and extremely good lookin’. But most of you have seen her since and it’s no use for me to dwell on that point. As the years went by I got to set a heap of store by Kate and she set a heap of store by me. But we kept it to ourselves till we was twenty. Then we agreed to be married. Our agreement didn’t do any good, for Abraham set his foot down on the scheme. He wasn’t goin’ to have no hirelin’ of his a-merryin’ his dotter. I explained to him how his days was drawin’ to an’ end; how a time was a-comin’ when the place wouldn’t do him any more good and no more harm ’ud come to him whether his farm-hand was runnin’ it or not; how his dotter would need lookin’ after and all that. His answer was to drive me away with a horse-whip.

“That was in November. For seven weeks I never laid eyes on the girl, for the old man watched her like a hawk. But he tired of that, and one night let her go to literary society meetin’ at Kishikoquillas school. I saw her there and

wanted her to elope right on the spot. She said no. It was too sudden. Besides, she wanted her things, for she knew her father would keep them just for spite if she run away without them. So we fixed it up that next night—that was Christmas Eve—she was to meet me at their barn, and we would take one of the horses and a sleigh and skip.

“Now, as I said, Abraham was a superstitious man and continual readin’ the almanac and perusin’ charms. He believed in that old sayin’ about the cattle talkin’ on Christmas Eve. Many a night he’d argued the point with me. I always said if he thot it was true, why didn’t he go listen to it. He declared he would, but he never did—leastways he put it off to a most onexpected time. If there was any place the cattle was likely to talk, I used to tell him, it was right in that big, spooky barn of his; and if there was any place where one could hear them perfect, it was right there. The stables was in the basement and the mows was overhead. The hay was stored above the horses and mules. A hole about ten feet across and twenty feet deep run from the top of the mow into that particular stable. I explained to him how he could lay at the top of the hay, put his head down into the hole and hear everything that passed. But that Christmas Eve I’d forgot all about our argument. I’d other things to think of.

"I reached the barn at midnight. Kate was there, standin' by the gate waitin'. Everything was clear. The old man, she said, had gone to bed and didn't have any suspicions. So we got the sleigh ready and went into the horse stable to harness up. It was clear moonlight outside but inside it was dark as pitch and fearful ghostly. There were all kinds of noises—hay rattlin', rats skippin' around, chains clinkin'; and every now and then a hen roostin' up in the racks would begin to cluck and scare Kate awful. Graveyards is bad at night but they ain't a circumstance to a big barn.

"I picked out the white John mule, for I knew he was a good traveler, and gettin' the harness, I went into his stall and began to fix it on him. Then I couldn't find any bridles. I whispered to Kate. She said they was over in the cow stable, and went to get one. It seemed to me she was gone an awful long time. I could hear her trampin' around, but as she didn't appear to be havin' much success I called, not very loud, 'What's wrong?'

"'Nothin',' she answered, 'I'll have them in a minute.'

"It seemed like I heard a suspicious noise come down the hayhole from the mow above. I listened, but I didn't hear any more sounds, so guessed it was a rat.

"~~Then~~ I called louder to Kate, for I was mad at

Abraham for all the trouble he'd given us, 'The old man is a mean customer if there ever was one!'

"She tramped around in the straw for a spell. Then her answer came from the cow stable, 'That's what I say.'

"'A nice way he treats his own dotter,' I went on, just talkin' for company. 'He thinks he'll take his farm with him when he dies. What a shame in a man of his age!'

"Again I heard a rattle of hay up above and whispered, 'Ssh!' But the girl didn't catch it and said particularly loud and spiteful, 'He has treated me powerful mean.'

"I put my hand to my ear and listened, but all was quiet, so I thinks to myself, 'It's a chicken.'

"'Don't you think kickin' is too good for a man like that, John?' Kate asks.

"'Well, I'd like to have it to do,' I answers. 'Oh! just you wait till I get a chance, and if I don't—'

"There was an awful scream in the mow—an unearthly scream. A great, black thing came tumblin' out of the hay hole into the stable, lettin' out fearful groans all the time. I couldn't see it very plain and didn't stop to investigate. I bumped into Kate as she was pilin' into the kitchen. We set down a minute to get our breath. Then I put my head out of the door. For a piece all was quiet. Then a faint call come from the

barn. She thot maybe it was a tramp had fallen down the hayhole. I wanted to go alone and see, but Kate wouldn't hear of it. She insisted on goin' with me and takin' a gun and a lantern.

"I opened the stable door, peeped in and said, 'Who's there?'

"The answer was a moan and, 'Is that you, John? Help!'

"There Abraham Buttenberger lay on a little pile of hay at the back of the stable, writhin' and moanin'.

" 'I always knew it,' he groaned. 'I always told you they talked on Christmas Eve. But why did you ever get me to try and hear them? See what you've led me to. Look at me layin' here with a broken leg and see what you've done. It was the white John mule—I know his voice. T'other was the brindle cow.'

" 'Look out for the mule! Look out!' he cried, as we carried him out of the stable and put him on a wheelbarrow.

"That's the way he took on. When we'd got him into the house I went up to town for a doctor. I attended him that night. The next day after he'd had breakfast, he set up in bed and says to me: 'John, I've heard people laugh about the sayin' that the cattle talk on Christmas Eve. I've heard you make fun of the idee. But you'd never laugh at it again if you heard what I did last night; if you'd had a mule heapin' coals of

fire on your head. And that cow! Oh, it's awful to have the very animals on the farm down on you like that.'

" 'What did they say?' says I.

" 'Say!' he answers. 'What didn't they say? I'll never have no peace behind that John mule again.'

"The old man was quiet a spell. Then he says, 'John, you can have my dotter, my only dotter.'

"And he begin to moan.

"Missus and I were married at home that Christmas just fifteen years ago. We never explained it to Abraham. There was no particular use in it. We couldn't 'a' convinced him any-way. Why, do you know he was so set on makin' up all around that he insisted that the brindle cow and the white mule know all about it. The ceremony was performed in the kitchen and them two knowin' beasts was hitched to the window so they could look in. He was bound to appease 'em."

The Teacher chuckled softly as he finished his narration.

The Storekeeper bit the legs off a candy ostrich. "It do beat all!" he exclaimed.

"I knowd it," the Loafer cried triumphantly. "I allus knowd it. I thank you, Teacher, fer backin' me up with this petickler instance of it. The cattle do talk on Chrismas Eve."

CHAPTER XII.

The Haunted Store.

THE Chronic Loafer cautiously opened the door and peered out into the black night. A blinding flash of lightning zigzagged across the heavens and descended to earth in a nearby wheat field, disclosing to his view the clear outlines of a great oak whose limbs were thrashing wildly in the wind. There was a sound of splintering wood, a crash of thunder overhead, then darkness again. The door swung shut with a startled bang. The rain beat violently against the windows.

"The ole tree's hit agin," the Loafer cried. "Did ye see that flash? Mighty souls, what a night! I wisht I'd gone home 'fore it begin to come down so heavy. I hevn't no umbrelly, an' the Missus'll never hear me callin' in sech a storm."

The store was a gloomy place, lighted as it was by a solitary oil lamp which cast weird shadows in the recesses of the dusty ceiling and over the shelves, laden with their motley collection of

crockery and glassware, boxes and cans. There was no fire in the stove, for it was late in the spring, so the atmosphere was damp and chilly.

The G. A. R. Man joined the Loafer at the door.

"Bad, ain't it?" he said. "I guesst I don't go home be way o' the Meth'dis' buryin'-ground to-night."

The other laughed and cried, "My sights! 'Fraid o' the buryin'-ground!"

The pair sauntered back to their places about the cheerless stove. The Storekeeper leaned his chair against the counter, fixed his feet firmly on the rungs and clasped both knees tightly with his hands.

"You can laugh an' say they ain't no sech things ez spooks," he said, "but I notice that you uns an' most other folks 'hen ye walks be the buryin'-ground at night, cuts th'oo the fields ez fur 'way from it ez ye can git."

The Loafer reddened. For a moment he beat his feet slowly against the side of the counter on which he had seated himself between the Miller and the Tinsmith. Then he retorted hotly, "I hain't sayd they was no sech things ez spooks."

"Mebbe they is an' mebbe they ain't," ventured the Miller in a low tone. "But ef they ain't, why hesn't Abe Scissors ben able to git a tenant fer that leetle place o' his back on the ridge? They sais it hes a ha'nt, an' tho' I've never seen

it, I knows folks that sais they hes, an' I've no reasons to doubt their words."

The G. A. R. Man nodded his head in assent. "I don't b'lieve in them ghosts meself, but 'hen it comes to goin' home be way o' the Meth'dis' buryin'-ground at night I allus goes the back road, even ef it is funder."

There was silence. Outside the rain beat furiously against the windows; in the garret overhead the wind whistled mournfully; from the cellar below came the faint clatter of loose boards as the rats scampered to and fro.

The Storekeeper reached behind him and turned the wick of the lamp up a little higher.

The Miller slipped from his place on the counter and seated himself on the box beside the veteran. He filled and lighted his clay pipe, and began: "My gran'pap used to tell how night after night he heard the churn splashin' down in his spring-house; an' how he stepped out once to find out what done it. He seen the sperrit of his first wife churnin' an' churnin', an' she told him how lest some un 'ud break the spell she'd hev to——"

The Chronic Loafer had glided off the counter and was rolling a keg close to the speaker. He fixed himself comfortably on it; then cried, "Turn up that there light. This dark hurts a felly's eyes."

The Tinsmith glanced furtively behind him into the blackness beneath the counter. He pushed

himself from his perch, intending to join the little knot about the stove. Hardly had he reached the floor and taken one step when he halted.

"Ssh! What's that?"

The Miller dropped his pipe. The Storekeeper paled and nervously grasped the back of his chair. The Chronic Loafer arose to his feet, his upraised arms trembling visibly. The G. A. R. Man, with eyes and mouth wide open, sat up rigidly upon his keg.

From the cellar beneath, low, but so distinct as to be heard above the patter of the rain and the rattle of the windows, came the sound of footsteps. It lasted but a moment, and then seemed to die away in the distance.

The Chronic Loafer broke the silence. "Sights! I'm goin'. The Missus'll be gittin' worrit."

He hurried to the door, but as he opened it there was a blinding flash of lightning, a crash of thunder, and the whole building trembled. A gust of wind drove the rain against the windows with redoubled vigor. He slammed the door shut and returned to his keg.

"Wha—what's that?" exclaimed the G. A. R. Man.

The Storekeeper shook his head mournfully. "It's the ha'nt that give my pap so much trouble."

"A ha'nt!" cried the Loafer and the Miller, their teeth chattering.

"Yes," replied the Storekeeper, leaning his

chair back on two legs. "That's what Pap use to say it was. He seen it. I never did, but ef you uns draws up closer I'll tell ye what he sayd about it."

Nothing loath to get as near as possible to each other the men, seated on chairs, kegs and boxes, formed a little circle about the Storekeeper, who began his story in a voice hardly above a whisper.

"My pap, you uns knows, run this here store an' done a pretty lively trade tell the year 'fore he died. He bo't it off o' ole Ed Harmon, who'd kep' it a long while. You uns may remember Ed, or mebbe ye don't. He was a mean man ef they ever was one; never hesytatin' to give short measure in sellin' butter an' takin' long in buyin'; allus buyin' eggs be the baker's dozen an' sellin' 'em the reg'lar way; usin' a caliker stick an inch short of the yard. It don't take many years o' that kind o' tradin' to hurt a man's repytation in these parts, an' consequent 'hen he died he'd the name o' bein' 'bout the dishonestest felly in the county, ef you uns reck'lect."

"That I do," the Miller interposed. "An' the sugar he sold was that wet ye could 'a' squeezed a tin o' wotter outen every pound."

"My sights!" cried the Loafer.

"Sure," continued the Storekeeper, "an' 'cor-din' to Pap, who hed the name fer tellin' the truth, them was his footsteps we heard jest now."

"Sam Hill!" muttered the G. A. R. Man.
 "His body's in the Meth'dis' buryin'-ground."

The Chronic Loafer cast an anxious glance toward the entrance to the store-room, from which a stairway wound down into the cellar. The Tinsmith shifted his chair closer into the circle. There was a roll of thunder along the mountains, a flash of lightning that seemed to find the earth somewhere among the distant ridges, but the rain was still pouring down in torrents.

"True. That's what Pap said," the Storekeeper continued in a low, awed tone. "He told me all about it afore he died, an' I guesst he told me right, fer we've heard his footsteps an' my sugar hes ben wet lately."

"So my Missus hes ben complainin'—still—but——"

The Storekeeper was slightly ruffled by this interruption and glared for a moment at its author, the Loafer. Then he resumed his narrative.

"It tuk Pap considerable time to build up his trade, but he give square measure, an' by an' by the folks begin comin' here 'stead o' goin' to Kishkoquillas. Then the trouble started. One day he found a chip stuck in the scales he used fer buyin' meat on, so it wouldn't weigh more'n fifty pounds. He licked me, that he did, tho' I never done it. Next day he found another stick there, an' he was that mad he licked me agin. Then I went away fer a week, an' every mornin' reg'lar he found

that chip. He begin to feel queer 'bout it 'hen he seen I wasn't responsible. So every day he pulled the chip out, till final it stopped. He thot it was rats.

" Things run 'long all right fer a year, an' then folks begin to complain that the sugar was damp, an' blamed Pap fer wettin' it to make it weigh. He sayd he didn't, an' he didn't, fer he wasn't no man to tell nawthin' but the truth, let alone to treat his sugar dishonest. But the customers begin to drop off buyin' an' he to be afraid o' losin' his trade. What was more, he seen that sugar he got in the bawrel ez dry ez a chip one night was damp next mornin'. 'Hen he declared it wasn't his fault, folks wouldn't believe him, an' they was no denyin' it, them goods was soakin'. So he concided he'd find out jest what was wrong. He found out an' never hed no more peace. What happened I tell you exactly ez he told me, an' I ain't hed no cause to disbelieve what he sayd, fer he wasn't a man to waste words.

" One night, jest after he'd got in a bawrel o' granilated, he went to the cellar an' made 'rangements to discover the trouble. He hed his ole shot-gun along an' hung an ile lantern to a joist in the middle. Then he set down on a pile o' sacks in a corner to watch. He wasn't a bit skeered at first, fer the lantern was burnin' cheery. An hour went by, an' he begin to git weary; they was no signs of anything wrong. Then another, an' he

begin to doze off. How long he slep' he didn't know, but a foot-fall woke him, an' he set up on the pile o' sacks an' looked. The lantern was flickerin' low, fer the ile hed most burned out, so they was only a dim light in the placet. His heart stopped beatin', an' his breath wouldn't come. Fer a moment they was dead silence. The lantern seemed like it was a-goin' to go out.

“Over from the other end of the cellar come a faint sound like the splashin' of wotter, drippin', drippin', drippin'. Pap raised hissself on his knees, all a-tremblin'. They was another spell o' quiet; then the same sound of a foot-fall; then 'nother an' 'nother; an' every time it made his heart thump like 'twould break an' jarred him all over. Out o' the dark, into the light o' the lantern, come the figur' of an ole man, walkin' slow, step be step, 'crosst the cellar toward the sugar bawrel. Pap rubbed his eyes in surprise, fer the felly was Ed Harmon, who for eight year had ben layin' in the Meth'dis' buryin'-ground, never missed. He wore that ole shiny black coat o' hisn, his broken, patched boots, an' gray cap; 'bout his neck was wound a blue woolen comforter, an' in his hand he kerried a bucket o' wotter. He'd wrapped a piece o' paper 'round the han'le to keep it from cuttin' his fingers. His face was all white like it used to be, 'cept his nose, which was red from his drinkin' too much

hard cider. He walked all doubled up, fer the bucket seemed to blow him consid'able.

"Pap laid quiet at first, he was so scared, tremblin' all over, with his teeth chatterin' to beat all. Sudden Ed stopped right under the lantern an' set the bucket down, the wotter splashin' over the side an' goin' up in a fog 'hen it struck the floor. Then he straightened up like to stretch his back, an' raised his hands to his mouth an' begin to blow on 'em. Pap didn't hear no sound but he seen the lamp flickerin'; an' at the sight o' Ed standin' there so nat'ral his courage come back.

"After the ghos' hed stopped a minute his face twisted like he was groanin', an' he picked up the bucket an' started on toward the sugar bawrel. 'Hen Pap seen that, he clean forgot it was a sperrit, it looked so lifelike. He jumped up an' run out yellin', 'Here you, Ed Harmon, don't you dast put that wotter on my sugar!'

"The ghos' stopped, turned 'round an' looked at Pap. Pap stopped an' looked at the ghos'. The appyrition set the bucket down easy an' blowed on his hands. That kind o' cooled the ole man.

"'You uns ain't ben treatin' me right,' sais Pap, polite like, 'dampin' my sugar an' sp'ilin' my trade.'

"Ed didn't say nawthin', but jest looked at him quiet like an' give his comforter another lap 'round the neck.

“‘Now, see here,’ sais Pap, a leetle louder. ‘I’ve found you out, Ed Harmon, an’ I’ll make it pretty hot fer you ’round these parts ef you don’t let up.’

“The sperrit turned proud like, blowed on its hands, leaned over an’ picked up the bucket, an’ started trampin’ toward the bawrel agin. Pap clean forgot hisself. He give a run an’ a kick at the pail, for he’d no desires to hurt the ole man, but ’tended jest to spill the wotter. He near dropped dead on the spot, fer his feet went right inter it ’thout his feelin’ it; the ole thing broke in a dozen pieces, the staves fallin’ in a heap on the floor; the wotter ’rose up in a fog like, an’ fer an instant he could see nawthin’. It cleared away an’ he noticed one o’ the hoops rollin’ off inter the dark. He made a run fer it an’ grabbed at it, but his hand went right up th’oo it. He th’owed his arm out, thinkin’ to ketch it that ’ay. Ez he looked up he seen the ole hoop revolvin’ there in the air above him. He give a wild jump at it. His hand struck the lantern an’ knocked it off the nail. They was a loud crash ez the glass broke. What happened after that he didn’t know. I found him sleepin’ on the pile o’ sacks next mornin’.”

“Sights!” cried the Chronic Loafer. He drew his chair closer into the circle, which by this time had reached the smallest possible circumference.

The Tinsmith glanced surreptitiously over his

shoulder toward the dark corner where lay the entrance to the store-room.

"It do beat all," he said.

From the mountains there came the low reverberation of thunder. The storm had passed the valley and now the rain was falling lightly and the breeze was dying.

"Was the sugar wet next day?" asked the Miller, nervously biting the end off the stem of his clay pipe.

"Ssh! Listen!" whispered the Loafer.

There was no sound save the gentle patter of the rain and the swish of the wind in the maples outside the door.

"It wasn't," the Storekeeper answered. "But the trouble began a week later."

"It's a strange story," said the Tinsmith, "an' ef any one but your Pap hed told it I'd hev my suspitchions. But his sugar was damp."

There was a long silence.

From the cellar came again the weird sound, low but distinct.

The G. A. R. Man arose and seized the lamp from the counter.

"They ain't no sech things ez ghos'," he cried. "This is all foolershness. Ef you fellys comes we'll find out what that is."

He shuffled slowly toward the dark end of the store. For a moment his companions hesitated. Then the Storekeeper joined the leader of the

hazardous enterprise and one by one the others followed. They tiptoed through the door; they wound their way among the boxes and barrels that filled the store-room, and reached the head of the stairway that led to the cellar. Here the G. A. R. Man halted. The lamp in his hand vibrated to and fro, throwing grotesque shadows on the white ceiling and walls. The men clustered about him and gazed timidly into the darkness beneath. He placed one foot on the step, then stopped.

"They ain't no sech things ez ghos'," he said.

"Course th-th-they ain't," chattered the Miller, who was holding the Storekeeper by the arm.

"It's r-r-rats," the Tinsmith ventured.

"Or a l-l-loose b-b-board," suggested the veteran.

"Foolershness," whispered the Loafer, "v-v-vestig-g-gatin' ghosts 'hen they ain't no sech things. The Missus is settin' up fer me an' I'll hev to be goin'."

"Pap allus was superstitchous," exclaimed the Storekeeper, as he made his way back through the maze of boxes and barrels to the store in the wake of the Loafer. The others were hurrying along in the rear.

The rain had ceased. Overhead the black clouds, visible in the bright starlight, were scurrying away towards the hills. The G. A. R. Man and the Loafer were parting at the latter's gate at the end of the village.

"Hev you ben gittin' any sugar o' him lately?" asked the veteran, pointing his thumb over his shoulder in the direction whence they had come.

"I hev," replied the Loafer. "An' I guess ole Ed Harmon is still at it."

"What do ye think it was?"

"It might 'a' ben a rat. It might 'a' ben a loose board. It might 'a' ben a hundred things like that. I ain't superstitchous—not a bit superstitchous." The speaker paused. "But jest the same I ain't fer investigatin' ghosts," he added.

CHAPTER XIII.

Rivals.

"WHAT was the question fer debate?" asked the School Teacher.

"Resawlv'd that the Negro is more worthy o' government support than the Indian," replied the Miller.

"And the decision?"

"One jedge voted fer the affirmative an' one fer the negative."

"And the third?"

"That's where the trouble come. Ye see, Theophilus Bones was the third jedge, an' he got up an' sayd that after hearin' an' weighin' all the argyments o' the debaters he hed to concide that neither the Negro nor the Indian was worthy."

"Deadlocked!" cried the pedagogue, bringing his chair down on all four legs with a crash, waving his arms and snapping his fingers. "Deadlocked, sure. What did ye do?"

"See here," interrupted the Chronic Loafer from his perch on a sugar barrel, "I can't see that it makes any diff'rence what they done.

S'posin' the Airy View Liter'ry Society is deadlocked. How's the poor Injun goin' to suffer any more by it?"

"But did you uns ever see sech dum jedges?" asked the Miller appealingly. "I was on the negative."

"The point is this," said the Teacher, shaking his cigar at the occupant of the barrel. "Here is a modern liter'ry society, whose main purpose is trainin' its members in the art of debate. An important question is put before this same society for formal discussion, and yet these self-same trained debaters makes their points so badly that one o' the jedges can't decide on the merits o' the question."

"It ain't so bad at all," the Tinsmith exclaimed. "I once heard Aleck Bolum on that verry question. He argyed both affirmative an' negative. All three o' the jedges was deadlocked. None of 'em could concide."

"Bolum must 'a' ben a wonderful talker," the Loafer said.

"Wonderful? Well, I guesst he was. Why, it was his debatin' broke up the Kishikoquillas Liter'ry Society. An' that was a flourishin' organization, too. Me an' my old frien' Perry Muthersbaugh started it together. After he went west Andrew Magill tuk a holt of it. He run it tell Aleck Bolum stepped in. Then it was a tug-o-war.

"Bolum was a livin' Roberts-rules-of-order. He was a walkin' encyclopedia of information. He knowd it an' never lost no opportunity of showin' it. Kishikoquillas schoolhouse was his principal place fer exhibitin'. From the time Andrew Magill's gavel fell on Friday night tell a motion was made to adjourn, Aleck was on his feet. Ef he wasn't gittin' off a select readin' or a recyitation or debatin', he was risin' to pints of order, appealin' from the decision o' the chair, callin' fer divisions or movin' we proceed to new business. Ye couldn't git any fresh wood put in the stove 'thout hevin' him move the 'pointment of a committee to do it. Ef a lamp burned low he'd want to hev it referred to the committee on lights. He even tried to git the recordin' seckertary impeached because she kep' the minutes in lead-pencil."

"What fer a lookin' felly was this Aleck Bolum?" asked the Chronic Loafer.

"He was a thin, leetle man, with a clean-shaved, hatchet face, an' a bald spot on the top o' his head over which he plastered a few skein o' lemon-colored hair."

"An' he wore a Prince Al-bert coat?" inquired the Loafer anxiously.

"Yes, a shiny black un. An' he'd stand up an' th'ow out his chist."

"Why, that's where half the trouble come," interrupted the Loafer. "Don't you know that ef

ye put a Prince Al-bert coat on a clothes-horse, it' ll stan' right up an' begin argyin' with ye? "

" My dear felly," replied the Tinsmith, " Aleck Bolum 'ud 'a' argyed in his grave clothes. They wasn't no stoppin' him. We thot mebbe we could quiet him be givin' him an office, so we 'lected him correspondin' seckertary, cal'latin' he'd hev nawthin' to do an' 'ud be satisfied with the honor. We'd complete misjudget him. He got up a debate be correspondence with a liter'ry society out in Kansas an' tuk up half our evenin's readin' reports on it.

" So Aleck Bolum didn't give Andrew Magill much chancet, even tho' he was president. It went hard with Andrew, too, fer he liked to fill in all the cracks in the meetin' hisself, an' objected to havin' Aleck bobbin' up with pints of order every time he opened his mouth. But fer my part I allus preferred Bolum to Magill. Bolum wasn't musical. Magill was. 'Henever one o' the reg'lar men on the progrim 'ud fail to be on hand an' he could head Aleck off, Andrew 'ud git up an' say, ' Mister So-an'-so, who hed the ess'y fer the evenin', bein' absent, the chair has consented to fill in the interval be singin' a solo.' Or the chair 'ud sing a duet with the seckertary; or the chair 'ud sing an anthem 'sisted be the society quartette. Then he'd stand up with his music marks an' start away on twenty verses about Mother or Alice.

“ Things kept gittin’ worse an’ worse. They final come to a head one night ’hen Aleck Bolum rose to a pint of order durin’ one of Andrew’s highest notes. Magill hed to stop singin’ an’ ast him to state his pint. Then Aleck moved the solo be the president be taken up under onfinished business. Andrew jest choked.

“ ’Hen the president got th’oo chokin,’ we tuk up the debate. Everything was subdued like. Andrew set on the platform wery quiet an’ solemn. The debaters didn’t put no heart in their work fer they was busy keepin’ one eye on him an’ the other on Bolum. Every one was kind o’ nervous an’ hushed—that is, every one ’cept Aleck. He argyed that the pen was mightier then the sword in the reg’lar debate. ’Hen the argyment was th’owed open to all he got up agin an’ proved that the sword was mightier then the pen.

“ We got th’oo with the debate an’ nawthin’ hed happened. Then Andrew Magill rose to give out the progrim fer the next meetin’. He looked solemn like at his paper a minute ; then gazed ’round the room. Ye could ’a’ heard a pin drop.

“ ‘ Several o’ our members,’ sais he, ‘ complains that they ain’t hed no opportunity to be heard afore this society. This progrim is got up especial to satisfy these gentlemen.’

“ An’ the progrim fer the follyin’ Friday, which he read out, run like this : ‘ Readin’ o’ the Scrip-

tur' be the president ; roll call ; select readin', Mr. Aleck Bolum ; recytation, Mr. Aleck Bolum ; extemporaneous oration, Mr. Aleck Bolum ; ess'y, The True Patriot, Mr. Aleck Bolum ; debate, Resawlded that works o' natur' is more beautiful then works o' art—affirmative, Mr. Aleck Bolum ; negative, Mr. Aleck Bolum.'

"Andrew finished an' set down in his chair. They wasn't even a whisper fer every eye in the room was turned on the correspondin' seckertary. He arose deliberate like, cleared his th'oat, th'owed open his coat so his red tie showed better, put the thumb o' his left hand in his waistcoat pocket, raised the other hand, pintin' his forefinger at the president. We was ready fer somethin' hot.

" 'Mr. Chairman,' he sayd, never crackin' a smile, ' I desires right here to express my approval o' this new plan o' yours o' hevin' the same man debate both sides o' the question. It's an excellent idee. Under the ole rule, where the debater was allowed to speak only on one side, we developed lopsided speakers. An' I want to say right here an' now an' to everybody in this room that I, fer my part, 'll do my best to make next week's meetin' beneficial to us all.'

" 'Hen Andrew Magill seen how he'd played right into Aleck Bolum's hand, thots failed to express his indignation. He adjourned the meetin', blowed out the lamps, put on his overcoat an' hat

an' walked outen the school-house an' down the road, jest all bubblin' over. But Andrew wasn't easy beaten. He'd no idee o' settin' all evenin' listenin' to Aleck Bolum's ess'ys an' select readin's. He slipped 'round 'mong the members on the quiet an' explained how he'd an invite from the Happy Grove Social Singin' Club, to bring the whole society up there the follyin' Friday. He explained what a good un it 'ud be on Aleck 'hen he got to the schoolhouse with his progrim all prepared an' found fer an aud'ence—Mr. Aleck Bolum. An' ez he offered to kerry three sled loads o' members to the grove hisself, everybody agreed. It really begin to look ez 'ef Aleck was goin' to be squelched.

"The snow was two feet deep, an' the sleighin' was fine. It tuk jest 'bout an hour an' a half to cover the twelve mile 'tween Kishikoquillas an' Happy Grove. We'd a splendid time, too. Andrew was in high sperrits. He pictured Aleck a-runnin' the liter'ry meetin' all hisself, an' give an imytation o' the debate on the question whether works o' natur' was more beautiful then works of art. It was killin'. I mind now how Andrew hed jest started in showin' us Bolum's recytation, 'hen we reached the clearin' where the school-house stood.

"The place was dark, absolute dark, an' the door was locked. They wasn't a soul in sight. Magill got out his watch. It sayd eight-fifteen

an' the singin' school was set fer eight. It looked peculiar. We guesst we'd better wait. So one o' the boys climbed th'oo a winder an' unlocked the door, an' we all went in. A few can'les was found an' lit. Then we set down to watch fer the arrival o' the Happy Grove Social Singin' Club. They wasn't any fire, an' the place was cold an' disygreeable. Some wanted to go home, but Andrew sayd no. We was the club's guests. Some of 'em 'ud be 'long any minute. It wouldn't be right fer them to find us gone. So we kep' settin', an' wonderin', an' guessin'.

"At the end of an hour we hear sleigh-bells down the road. Then they was a stampin' o' boots outside on the portico.

"'Here they is at last,' sais Andrew, gittin' up on the platform an' rappin' fer order.

"The door opened. In steps Aleck Bolum. The whole society give a groan.

"'What's the trouble?' sais he, walkin' to the middle o' the room. 'I don't hear no singin'.'

"The society jest hung their heads an' looked sheepish.

"'Where's the Happy Grove Social Singin Club?' sais he pleasant like. 'I sees only our own members.'

"No one sayd nawthin'.

"Aleck unwound his comforter, unbottomed his coat, th'owed out his chist an' cried, 'Mr. Chairman, hev I the floor?'

"Magill kind o' mumbled.

" 'Then,' sais Bolum, 'mebbe I can th'ow some light on the hushed voices I see gethered 'round me here to-night. Firstly, I'd like to say that we'd a most excellent meetin' at Kishikoquillas this evenin'. After we adjourned I thot I'd run up here an' see how you was makin' out, fer I hed pecul'ar interest in this getherin'. Th'oo some mistake I was not properly notified that our members was comin' here, but I learned of it. I wanted to see the Kishikoquillas Liter'ry Society do itself proud to-night at music ez well ez literature. So in my capacity ez correspondin' seckertary I got up a musical program yeste'day an' forwarded it to the president of the Happy Grove Social Singin' Club, explainin' how our organization 'ud entertain his organization to-night with melody, instrumental an' vocal.'

"Bolum stopped an' drew a paper out o' his pocket.

" 'Will the seckertary please read the program?' he sayd.

"Josiah Weller tuk the paper. He looked at it. Then he piked one eye on the president.

" 'Ye may read the program, Mr. Seckertary,' sais Andrew, wery dignified.

"An' Josiah read like this, 'The Kishikoquillas Liter'ry Society will be pleased to render fer the entertainment o' the Happy Grove Social Singin'

Club the follyin' selections: bass-horn solo, The Star Spangled Banner, Mr. Andrew Magill.'

"The chairman's gavel come down on the table, an' he rose an' said, 'I feels flattered be Mr. Bolum puttin' me on the progrim, but he otter 'a' notified me, so I could 'a' brung me horn.'

"'Go on, Mr. Seckertary,' sais Aleck, wery cool.

"Josiah continyerd, 'Vocal solo, I see/Mother's Face at the Window, Mr. Andrew Magill.'

"The Chairman looked wery pleased.

"'Go on, Mr. Seckertary,' sayd Aleck.

"'An ole time jig, jewsharp an' harmonica mixed, Mr. Andrew Magill; vocal solo, Meet Me Alice at the Golden Gate, Mr. Andrew Magill; anthem, Angel Voices, Mr. Andrew Magill, 'sisted be the society.'

"Josiah Weller didn't git no funder. They was a low roar went over the room. Some felly in the rear 'lowed we otter put him in the pond. But they wasn't no one to put. Aleck Bolum hed dissypeared. We got to the door in time to hear his sleigh-bells jinglin' way off th'oo the woods. Seemed like we could 'most hear him chucklin', too."

"But what hed become o' the Happy Grove Social Singin' Club?" asked the Miller. "Why wasn't they there?"

"I guesst you never heard Andrew Magill sing, did ye?" replied the Tinsmith.

CHAPTER XIV.

Buddies.

THE Patriarch sat on the store porch. An old cob pipe, the smoke oozing lazily from its mouth, protruded from the recesses of his white beard. His eyes were fixed on the mountains over whose sides the black, sharp shadows of the clouds were wandering. His mood was so pensive as to awaken the curiosity of the Storekeeper, who had been watching the old man sitting upright on the bench, his gaze fastened on the distant hills.

"What are ye thinkin' of, Gran'pap?" the young man asked.

"I was thinkin' o' Hen Wheedle. I hain't thot o' him fer a year, so I sais to meself to-day, I sais, 'You otter think o' Hen Wheedle!' An' I set right down, an' a mighty good time I've hed a medytatin' over him."

The Miller laid the county paper over his knees and smoothed it out. Then he looked at the Patriarch.

"My souls!" he cried. "Why, Hen's ben over the mo'ntain nigh onto forty year."

"That's jest the pint," was the rejoinder. " 'Hen folks is gone ye otter think on 'em."

To the old man there was nothing beyond the mountains but infinite space. To him the world was bounded by the green range before him and the range back by the river. The two sprang out of the blue at a point some nine miles to the north, went their own ways some fifteen miles to the south, joined, and made the valley and the world. To go over the mountain to him meant voluntary annihilation. He would step off into space beyond and become nothingness. In the seventy-five years of his life he had known men to return, but it was as though they had arisen from the dead.

"You uns knowd Hen Wheedle?" he inquired.

"He was afore my time but I've heard o' him," replied the Miller.

The Chronic Loafer looked up from the steps, where he had been sitting, whittling a piece of soft white pine.

"I s'posn you've heard o' Bill Siler?" he asked, in a pleasant, alluring tone.

"Bill Siler," repeated the Miller. He laid his forefinger against his forehead and thought a minute. "I think I hev. His name's wery famil-'ar. But why did ye ast?"

"Oh, jest because I've noticed that most everybody was afore your time an' you've heard o' 'em. I never knowd Bill Siler. His name was jest

ginirated in my head, an' I thot ye might tell me who he was."

"You thot ye'd ketch me, heigh," cried the other. "Ye thot ye'd be smart an'——"

"Boys, boys," the Patriarch shook his stick at his companions. "Don't quarrel—don't. Mebbe some day one o' ye'll go over the mo'ntain an' then every mean word ye ever sayd'll come back. Mean words is like them wooden balls on a 'lastic string that they sells the children at the county fair. The harder they is an' the wiolenter ye th'ow 'em the quicker they bounces home to ye an' the more they hurt. I otter know. Hen Wheedle otter know. Why every time he thinks o' me his conscience must jest roll around inside o' him." The light in the old man's pipe had gone out. He applied a sulphur match to it and sneezed violently. "But I've forgot the wrong Hen done me. He must 'a' suffered innardly fer it. Ef he ever returns I'll put this right hand in hisn an' say, 'Hen, you done wrong, but you've suffered innardly an' I fergive ye.' They's a heap o' difference 'tween plain, ord'nary sufferin' inside o' ye, an' sufferin' innardly. Fer the first ye takes bitters, stops smokin' an' in a day you're all right. But 'hen the conscience gits out o' order all the bitters in the world an' all the stoppin' smokin' in creation'll give ye no ease. That's what I sais, an' I otter know, fer I can jest see how Hen Wheedle feels."

No sulphurous fume was blazing around the Patriarch's nose, but he sneezed again and choked himself with a piece of canton-flannel that served him as a handkerchief.

'Hen an' me was raised on joinin' farms. From the time we was big enough to gether eggs we was buddies. At school the boy that licked me had to lick both; the boy that was licked be one was licked be both. It was a reg'lar caset o' David an' Joshuay all over agin.

"They's only one thing in the world'll separate buddies like me an' him was. A crow-bar won't do it; a gun won't; nothin' won't but a combination o' yeller hair an' dreamy blue eyes an' pink cheeks. Melissy Flower hed 'em all. But what she done she didn't do intentional. I didn't want her without Hen hevin' her; he didn't want her without me hevin' her—so they was a hitch. We used to go over to her house together allus, an' we'd sing duets to her melodium playin'. He sung tenor an' I bass. At the eend of each piece she distributed her praise jest equal. 'Hen we wasn't hevin' music we'd be on the settee, all three, first him, then her, then me. Ef Hen was so fortnit ez to catch the sparkle o' her eyes, she'd turn her head my way an' give me a chancet too.

"Now things went on this way tell one night we was comin' home from her house together. We reached the covered bridge where the road

dewided, one fork goin' to his placet an' one to mine. How clear I remembers it!

“ ‘Henry,’ I sais, lookin’ right inter his eyes— it was moonlight an’ I could almost read his thots, ‘Henry, it seems to me like you’ve ben thinkin’ more ‘an usual o’ Melissy lately.’

“ ‘I was thinkin’ the same of you,’ sais he.

“ ‘You’re right,’ I answers. ‘But I won’t treat no buddy o’ mine mean.’

“ ‘An’ the same with me,’ sais he.

“ ‘We was quiet a piece. Then I sais, ‘Henry, ef ever I finds I can’t stand it no longer I’ll tell you.’

“ ‘An’ ef ever I gits the same way I’ll tell you,’ sais he.

“ ‘We shook hands an’ went home.

“ ‘I s’pose things ‘ud ‘a’ gone on ez they was fer a good many year hed not a young town felly from up the walley come drivin’ down in slick clothes an’ in a slick buggy. You uns hev all heard the old sayin’ that it ain’t the clothes that makes the man. Ye never heard the proverb that it ain’t the paint that makes the house, did ye? I guess ye didn’t, yit it’s jest ‘bout ez sensible. It ain’t the paint that makes the house, but it’s the paint that keeps the boards from rottin’ an’ the hull thing from fallin’ to pieces out o’ pure bein’ ashamed o’ itself. Solerman was the wisest man that ever lived, yit the Bible sais that he allus run to fine raiment. He hed a thousand

an' odd wives an' knowd well enough that he wouldn't hev no peace with 'em ef he run 'round in his bare feet an' overalls. 'Hen the Queen o' Sheby called on him ye can bet your bottom dollar she didn't find him settin' on the throne with a hickory shirt 'thout no collar, an' his second-best pants held up be binder-twine galluses."

The old man had been talking very fast and was out of breath. He paused to gather the threads of his story.

The School Teacher seized the opportunity to remark: "An' yet Solerman in all his glory was restless an' unhappy."

"He knowd too much," drawled the Loafer, looking up from his stick. "An' Gran'paw, with all of his wisdom, with all the good uns he sayd, Solerman never knowd what it was to light his ole pipe an' set plumb down on the wood-pile an' play with the dog. Why, he'd sp'iled his gown."

"Boys," resumed the Patriarch, "slick clothes an' a slick hoss an' a slick buggy goes ten times further with a woman than a slick brain. She can see a man's clothes; she can see his hoss; she can see his buggy. But it takes her fifty year to git her eyes adjusted so she can see his mind. That's why I got worrit 'hen this here Perry felly got to drivin' down to wisit Melissy. He come oncet; he come agin, an' I begin thinkin' more o' him then I did o' the girl. Sometimes it seemed like I was goin' mad yit I couldn't do nawthin' on Hen's account.

Many an afternoon I set here on this wery porch rewolvin' it over an' over : ' Ef I don't git her I'll die ; ef I git her Hen'll die ; ef Perry gits her both on us'll die.' It was a hard puzzle. A couple o' times I was near solvin' it be leavin' the main part o' the sufferin' to the other fellys, but then I minded how Hen looked at me that night ez we parted at the fork o' the road, an' I sais, ' I'll treat no buddy o' mine mean. Git behind me, Satan, an' make yerself comf'table tell I need ye.'

" But one afternoon 'hen I was feelin' petickler low in sperrits, oneasy, onrastless, I seen Perry drivin' th'oo, his hoss curried tell his coat was smooth ez silk, his buggy shinin' like it 'ud blind me, an' him settin' inside in a full new suit o' clothes. I knowd she couldn't stand all that wery long. So after supper I went right over to Wheedle's to git Hen, 'lowin' we'd go down to Flower's an' let Melissy settle the business be choosin'. He wasn't een. His ma sayd he'd jest left, but she s'posed he'd be right hum agin. So I fixed me-self on the pump trough an' waited. My, but them hours did drag ! The sun set an' it got dark. I could look down the hill to Flower's placet an' see a light twinklin' in the best room where I knowd she was with Perry. I pictured her at the melodium twiddlin' her fingers soft-like over the keys while he leaned over her singin', ' Thine eyes so blue an' tender.' Boys, it was terrible—terrible. The lamp was allus a-twinklin' to me to hurry up.

Then final it seemed to git tired an' went out. It was only eight o'clock. Now I pictured 'em settin' in the dark. I wanted to leave right there an' run down the hill, but I sais, 'No ; I'll treat no buddy o' mine mean.'

"By an' by the moon come up an' the chickens in the barn quit cluckin' at the rats. I begin to git dozy an' leaned my head agin the pump. 'Hen I come to me senses the roosters was crowin' an' the light was creepin' over the ridges yander. I went home. Ez I come 'round the corner o' the house, there I see Hen Wheedle sound asleep on the back stoop.

" 'Hen,' sais I, 'what hev you ben doin' ?'

" 'Waitin' fer you,' he answers, ez he gits up an' rubs his eyes. 'I come over last night to git you an' go over to Flower's. Perry's there.'

"I told him how I'd waited all night fer him, an' he jest groaned. He had 'em wery bad. I mind oncet readin' in the weemen's column in the paper how spilt milk could be sopped up with a sponge. It seemed jest ez tho' that was what we was doin' 'hen we went over to Flower's that mornin'. It was wery early an' we'd a long time to wait 'fore Melissy come down to git breakfast. Then Hen an' me stepped inter the kitchen.

"I thot she'd faint.

" 'Why, you're airy,' she sais.

" 'We've come airy a purpose, Melissy,' sais I. 'We wants you to choose atween us.'

"That girl must 'a' thot a heap o' one o' we two—which un I don't know, but one sure, fer she kind o' fell agin the table, graspin' it fer support. She raised her apron over her face an' gasped like.

" 'Take whichever one ye want,' sais Hen kind o' soft.

"She didn't answer.

" 'Don't keep us een suspenders,' sais I.

"Then the apron fell from her face, showin' it all a rosy red, an' she tells us, 'Boys, I'm awful sorry, but you're late. I tuk Perry last night.'

"Hen an' me turned on our heels an' walked out. We didn't say nawthin' tell we come to the fork in the road.

"Hen stopped an' wentured, 'We've ben fools.'

" 'We hev,' I sais.

" 'Them town fellys doesn't last long,' sais he after a spell. 'She's like to be a widdy.'

" 'In which caset,' sais I, 'our agreement stands. We notify each other 'fore we ast her.'

" 'It does,' he answers, quiet an' wery solemn. 'We've allus ben buddies, you an' me, an' we allus will be.'

"Melissy Flower become a widdy ez Hen 'lowed an' a mighty nice un, too. Perry was hardly cold tell me an' Wheedle was over singin' duets with her. The ole trouble come on agin fer me worse than ever, but this time I made up me

mind I wouldn't be fooled. 'Hen I could stand it no longer, I walks one night over to Wheedle's to notify him. He wasn't there. I'd 'a' gone on to Flower's but I minded our agreement an' was true. It was a temptation, but I'd never treat no buddy o' mine mean. I was true. It come twelve o'clock an' they was no sign o' him, so I went back home feelin' a leetle heavy here." The old man laid his hand across the watch-pocket of his waistcoat. "Next day they was a postal in the mail fer me. It was from Hen, an' it run like this: 'I'm on me way to Flower's to ast her. I drop this in the box to notify you ez I promised.'

"That's the way he give me notice. While I was waitin' to notify him right, he was astin' her. He done wrong. His conscience was agin him, fer 'hen I went over to his placet to give him an idee what I thot, I found him an' she hed gone—gone over the mo'ntain yander."

The Patriarch arose and shook his stick angrily at the distant hills. He shook it until his strength had given out and his anger had ebbed away.

"That was forty year ago," he said after a long silence, "but ef ever Hen Wheedle comes back I'll lay this here right hand in hisn an' say, 'Hen, you done wrong, but you've suffered innardly I fergive ye.'"

CHAPTER XV.

Joe Varner's Belling.

THE wind rattled the windows and made creepy, unpleasant noises in the trees outside. At long intervals it ventured down the chimney with sudden spurts and playfully blew the smoke out into the room, causing momentary discomfort to the eyes of all three of us. Then as quickly it would retire, giving a triumphant whistle as though it enjoyed the joke hugely. The soot would come tumbling down and envelop the flames in a cloud of black dust. A crackle, a splutter, and the logs blazed up as cheerily as ever.

I stretched my feet toward the fire and buried myself deeper in my great arm-chair. Flash, the setter, curled at my side, poking his nose between his fore-paws, fixed his earnest eyes on a tiny tongue of flame that was eating its way along a gnarled bit of hickory. Facing us, rocking slowly to and fro on two legs of his frail wooden chair, was Theophilus Winter, the lawyer and our companion on many a day's hunt. This was to

Theophilus the acme of comfort, for he had a good cigar for an inspiration and the best of audiences, an intelligent dog and a tired man.

* Yes, as I was saying before that last gust interrupted us, I am not a superstitious man, but as long as no harm can come of it I prefer to plant my garden in the right sign. While I am not in the least superstitious I must confess some timidity on this one point—that is, as to passing the small log house that stands just at the foot of the ridge on the road to Kishikoquillas on the night of the twenty-ninth of December, or indeed almost any time after sunset. Not that I am afraid—far from it—but strange tales have been abroad for the last thirty years regarding the doings there after nightfall. They say that the sound of fiddles can be heard, the clanging of cow-bells and occasionally the dull report of a gun. This, the young folks declare, is the ghosts belling Joe Varner.

“ Perhaps you have seen the house of which I have spoken. It stands in a little clearing, about fifty feet from the roadside. The great stone chimney is now almost completely demolished. The plaster daubing has fallen from the chinks between the logs, revealing to the passer-by the barren interior. The glass has been removed from the shattered windows to let the light into some more respectable dwelling. The weeds and briars grow rank over all. The place presented a far different

picture thirty years ago. Then all was scrupulously clean. Not a stone on the chimney top was out of place, not an iota of daubing had fallen away, nor was the smallest spot left unwhitewashed. Everywhere was the evidence of industry and thrift.

"For twenty years Joe Varner had lived his lonely life there, with no other companion than a mongrel dog. He was a strange man, tall and gaunt in appearance, taciturn and surly in manner, doing his bad deeds in public and his good ones in private, for his pride would not allow him to parade the latter before his neighbors. Yet with it all he was at heart a kindly old fellow who had simply been spoiled by his way of living. And why he had chosen this way was a puzzle to all our people. He was not a native of our county, but had simply appeared one day, bought this secluded plot, built his house and settled here. Twice, leaving no one behind him, he went away, remained a week and then as quietly returned to resume his lonely life. On each occasion his return was marked by a fit of melancholy which attracted the attention but repelled the curiosity of his nearest neighbors. That he had visited his old home in a distant county was all they could ever learn.

"Just thirty years ago this coming December, Varner left for the third time. A week passed, and he did not return. Two weeks went by, and

he was still absent. Strange rumors were abroad as to the cause of this unaccountable delay. When the third week had reached its end he came home, bringing with him a wizened little woman, with a hard face and of a most slovenly appearance. This person he introduced laconically, but with a very evident touch of pride, as his wife.

“Just who the woman was or where from no one knew and none dared ask, but the news of her arrival spread quickly. Here was an opportunity not to be lost—to bell old Joe and his mysterious bride. Never before had the valley made such preparations for a serenade. Full fifty men and boys met at my father’s barn on the night following the old man’s home-coming, and armed with old guns, fiddles, sleigh bells and horns we set out for the scene of our operations. It was a good two mile walk to the house on the ridge, and we reached it just as the full moon was climbing over the tree tops and peeping into the clearing. There was no sign of life anywhere save a few dim rays of light that shone through a crevice in the shutters.

“Silently we stationed ourselves about the cabin. At each corner we placed a horse-fiddle, an unmusical instrument made by drawing the edge of a board, coated with resin, over the corner of a large box. The signal was given, and forthwith arose the greatest din that had ever been heard in our county. The banging of the muskets,

the bells, the horns, with the melancholy wail of the horse-fiddles rising above them all, made an indescribable tumult. But the result was not as we had expected. We believed that Joe and his wife would come to the door, bow their acknowledgments and invite us in to a feast of cake and cider, as is the custom. Instead the light died suddenly. No sound was heard within.

"We kept to our work bravely. A half hour passed. Cries of 'Bring out the bride' arose above the din, giving evidence that lusty lungs were coming to the aid of wearied limbs. 'Bring her out. Fetch out Mrs. Varner, Joe!' we called again and again.

"It was of no avail. An hour passed and not a sign of life had come from the interior of the cabin. The noise began to weaken in volume, the owners of the guns grew chary of wasting their powder, and at last, much to our chagrin, we were compelled to retire to the woods for a consultation.

"A thin stream of smoke pouring from the mouth of the chimney suggested a plan resorted to only on the most desperate occasions—that of smoking out the newly wedded pair. It was the work of but a few minutes to obtain a board suitable for the purpose and for one of the young men to climb to the roof with it. He made his way noiselessly to the peak, laid his burden across the top of the chimney, then crouched low to

await the outcome. The smoke ceased to escape. Another half hour passed and still no sign from the house. Anxious looks appeared on the faces of the serenaders. The man on the roof removed the cover and a dense volume of smoke arose, showing that the fire had done well the work we required. From beneath the doorway, too, a few thin wreaths were circling vaguely out.

“A chill of dread passed over us. It seemed that something out of the ordinary must have happened within. At first we were inclined to the belief that the fact that the smoke had not driven out the occupants of the house proved that it was empty. But we remembered the light that we had seen burning on our approach. It augured evil.

“Four stalwart fellows, holding between them a large log, attacked the door. One blow—it cracked. No sound inside. Another blow and the heavy oak fell back on its hinges. The smoke, released from its prison, poured out in dense clouds, driving the excited bellers from the doorway. One man dashed through it and across the single apartment, which passed as living-room and kitchen, and in another instant the window was up, the shutters open and the wind was whistling through, driving before it the heavy veil that had hidden the interior from our view. The moonlight streamed in.

“There, sitting in a great wooden rocking-chair,

his feet resting almost in the fire, his head fallen low upon his breast, his stern, hard features calmly set as if in sleep, sat he whom we had come to bell—dead. On the spotless table by his side stood a candlestick from which the candle had burned away, only a bit of charred taper remaining to tell us that in all likelihood Joe had died before we reached his home and that the last spark of the unattended light had fluttered out, just as we began the hideous turmoil outside. Clutched in the old man's right hand was the explanation of his lonely life as well as of the grewsome ending of the great belling."

Theophilus Winter ceased his narration. He drew out his pocketbook and after fumbling a moment in its recesses, took from it a bit of paper. It was yellow with age and soiled, and the writing on it had almost faded out, but I could read : "Deer Joe—you and me was never ment for one another. i knowed that 40 years ago and thats wi i run way with si tompson, you was good to take me back them too other times i left, this last time i thought i was gettin to old an you was so fergivin i had better spend my las days with you. i cant stand the quiet country livin an am gone back to harrisburg. they aint no one with me. fergive me. i gess youll be better off without your old wife—sarah."

CHAPTER XVI.

The Sentimental Tramp.

"ANYTHING new ben happenin' to you uns, Trampy?" asked the Chronic Loafer. "We ain't seen ye 'bout these parts sence corn-plantin' a year."

"Nothin' unusu'l," replied the Tramp, laying on the porch his stick and the bandana handkerchief that contained his wardrobe. He seated himself on the step. "Nothin' unusu'l. I wintered in Philadelphia an' started fer these parts in May."

"Seems like you're lookin' mighty glum," said the Storekeeper. He had ceased his whittling and was examining every detail of the wanderer's dress and physiognomy. "Might s'pose ye was in love agin."

The traveller sighed.

"You air the sentimentalist tramp I ever seen," the Miller cried. "Every time ye comes th'oo these parts, it's a new un. Does ye think the weemen is so almighty blind ez to git struck on a hoodoo like you?"

"I keeps me passions an' me shortcomin's to meself," replied the wanderer after he had lighted his corncob pipe. "I've had a heap o' hard luck. I wouldn't min' gittin' in love or in jail fer murder sep'rate, but both at oncet is too much even fer a man like me."

"Hedgins!" the Loafer exclaimed, edging toward the end of the bench furthest from the vagrant. "In jail fer murder!"

A faint smile flitted across the face of the Tramp. Then he began his story:

"In jail fer murder an' in love wit' the Sher'ff's dotter—that's exactly what happened to me. It's onjust; it ain't right, it ain't, even fer a man o' my shortcomin's. Let's see. This is hay harvest, ain't it. Well, it was jest about corn-plantin' it all come about. I'd been workin' me way easy up along the Sussykehanner, an' one night put up wit' an ole feller named Noah Punk, who lived in a lawg house at the foot o' the big mo'ntain this side o' Pillersville. They was no one there but him an' his woman. She was a bad-tempered creetur' an' made things hum 'round that ranch when me an' the ole man was playin' kyards after supper. They put me to bed in the garret, an' next day I set out agin. Punk he sayd he'd walk up the road a piece wit' me, an' he did. We parted at a crossroads two mile from his house. That was the last I ever seen of him. I'd never thot no more of him nuther ef it hedn't been that

two days later, when I was joggin' easy like into Jimstontown, I was 'rested—'rested, mind ye, fer the murder o' Noah Punk. I never knowd jest what it was all 'bout tell I was comf'table fixed in the kyounty jail. An' then I didn't keer, fer I'd met the Sher'ff's dotter.

"Oh, but she was a star! Jest ez plump ez ye make 'em, wit' a dimple, an' yaller shiny hair, an' jest ez red ez a ripe rambo apple. When she brought me up me supper the fust night, I ast her what I was up fer, an' she tol' me.

"It seems like no one ever seen Noah Punk after him an' me left the house. He never come back, an' when they hunted fer him they found nothin' but one o' his ole shoes, all covered wit' blood, be the canal where him an' me parted. They 'rested me bekase I was last seen wit' him. Then the Sher'ff wanted to hang some un.

"When I heard that I was kind o' tired, an' fer a time jest held me head down, never sayin' nothin'. Then I looks up an' seen Em'ly standin' there so sorrerful.

" 'How long'll it be tell they hangs me?' I ast.

" 'They'll try you next month,' she sais. 'Then I'd 'low another month tell——' She bust plum inter tears.

" 'Two months, Em'ly,' sais I, I sais, 'an' you feeds the prisoners. They'll be the bless'dest two months o' me life.'

" 'Deed, an' that's jest how I felt. Them words

was true ef I ever sayd a true word. The bless-'dest two months o' my life.

" But them days did fly! I never thot no more o' Noah Punk or o' hangin'. It was all of Em'ly. They was four other prisoners in the jail, an' I never played no kyards wit' them, but jest sot a-thinkin' o' her. She use ter bring us our meals three times a day. Quick ez I'd finish eatin' I'd set waitin' fer her to come agin. Jail was a happy place fer me. I never wanted to leave it.

" You uns otter 'a' seen me in them days. I wasn't sich a bum ez I am now. The Sher'ff give me a shave an' a new suit. Puttin' all in all, I was a pretty slick lookin' individu'l—no red hair an' whiskers shootin' out in all directions, makin' me look like an ile lamp, ez I hear one feller put it. Me coat didn't hang like curtains, an' me pants was all made o' the same piece o' goods. I was a dude, I was, in spite o' me present short-comin's in that respect. Sometim's I think mebbe Em'ly thot so too, fer she use to allus give me a bigger potaty than the other fellers. They guyed me a heap about it.

" A month went by, an' I was gittin' wus an' wus, when they tuk me out an' tried me fer killin' Noah Punk. They was a smart, little chap they called the 'strict 'torney what done all the work agin me. He showed the jury Punk's bloody shoe an' my clothes. A doctor sayd the spots on

my clothes was huming blood. They was, but it was mine, an' it got there be my leanin' agin a nail. Missus Punk told how I slep' at the house. Another feller sayd how he'd seen me an' Punk walkin' along the canal. I 'lowed I didn't kill Punk an' that jedgin' from what I seen o' Missus Punk, he'd 'a' thanked me ef I had. Missus Punk an' the 'strict 'torney got riled at that, an' the jedge come down so hard I didn't dast say another word. Then the jury found I was guilty, an' the jedge 'lowed they'd hang me that day four weeks. But I didn't keer, fer it was one month more in jail to be fed be Em'ly.

"That night she brought me a bigger potaty 'an ever. When I seen it I sais, sais I, 'Em'ly, will you be sorry when I'm goin'?"

"'Deed an' I will, Tom,' sais she.

"'Then I'll be glad to go,' sais I. An' 'bout half that potaty went down inter me lungs, I choked so bad."

The Chronic Loafer observed, "It do seem like Em'ly were jest a leetle gone, Trampy."

"Mebbe she was. I don't know. But that very night the other pris'ners onloosed all the locks wit' a penknife. They wanted me to go. I 'lowed I'd stay. I never let on what was wrong, but sayd I was an innercent man an' wouldn't run. They give me the laugh, an' that was the last I ever seen of 'em.

"The day o' the hangin' come. I'd ben gittin'

wus an' wus 'bout the Sher'ff's dotter. I didn't keer much 'bout goin', but I hated to leave the ole jail. I'd a heap sight ruther 'a' gone, tho', wit' flyin' colors an' hed her sorry then to 'a' ben kicked out to trampin'. Em'ly didn't give me breakfas' that mornin'. Instead, the Sher'ff served me chicken an' eggs an' a lot of other things they only gives a tramp 'fore they hangs 'im. He togged me out in a nice fittin' black suit and tuk me out ter go. Mighty, but they was a crowd to see me off! The jail-yard was filled with prom'nent citizens; the housetops an' trees around the wall was jest black wit' men an' boys. I braced right up an' never feazed a bit when I seen the rope. The Sher'ff sayd I could make a speech, so I gits up an' sais, easy like, 'Me frien's,' I sais, 'I haven't no regrets in leavin' this 'ere world, fer I hain't been onduly conf'table. It's the jail I'll miss, an' the Sher'ff's pretty dotter. I've——'

"Jest then the Sher'ff yelled, 'Hold on!'

"I turned an' seen him readin' a letter. It had come from Noah Punk out in Kansas. He sayd he wrote bekase he seen be the papers they was hangin' a man fer killin' him. He wanted to explain that he was still livin' an' hed only run away from Mrs. Punk. The blood on his shoes come from his steppin' on a piece of glass. He'd tuk off his boots an' gone west on a freight.

"When the crowd hear that they give the

Sher'ff a groan. The Sher'ff he got mad, an' tuk all me new duds, give me me ole ones an' turned me looset.

"I was a common ord'nary tramp an' I was clean discouratched. I knowd I'd never have Em'ly feed me agin 'less I got back in that jail, so I set right down on the steps. The Sher'ff jest wouldn't 'rest me but druv me off wit' a club. I busted two o' his winders next day. Still he wouldn't 'rest me. I broke three more winders an' he nabbed me. I was nigh tickled to death wit' me luck. But then I hain't no luck. That there man treated me jest the way a farmer does a cat that eats chickens. He put me on a train, tuk me out to Altony an' turned me looset."

The Tramp sighed and puffed vigorously on his pipe.

"An' now what air ye doin'?" asked the Store-keeper.

"What else 'ud a man do?" replied the traveller. "I'm hustlin' jest ez fast ez I kin to git back to that jail. An' I'm goin' ter git in it. I'll never eat another potaty onless it comes from the hand o' the Sher'ff's dotter."

"Does you know what I wisht?" inquired the Chronic Loafer earnestly.

"What?"

"I wisht Noah Punk hedn't wrote that letter."

CHAPTER XVII.

Hiram Gum, the Fiddler.

THE last red rays of the evening sun disappeared below the mountains and the gray twilight settled over the valley. The mill ceased its rumbling. The mower that all day long had been clicking merrily in the meadow behind the store stood silent in the swaths, and the horses that had drawn it were playfully dipping their noses in the cool waters of the creek. The birds—the plover, the lark and the snipe that had whistled since day-break over the fields and the robins and sparrows that had chirped overhead in the trees—had long since made themselves comfortable for the impending night. By and by the woods beyond the flats assumed a formless blackness and from their dark midst came the lonely call of the whip-poorwill. The horses splashed out of the creek and clattered through the village to the white barn at the end of the street. The Miller padlocked the heavy door of the mill and bid good night to his helper, who trudged away over the bridge swinging his dinner pail. Then he beat

the flour out of his cap on the hitching-post and lounged up to the store. He threw himself along the floor, and after propping his back against a pillar, lighted his pipe.

" 'Hen it comes to fiddlin'," the Chronic Loafer was saying, "they is few men can beat Sam Washin'ton. Why I've knowd him to set down at a party at seven at night an' fiddle till six next mornin' an' play a different tune every time."

"Did you ever hear o' Hiram Gum?" asked the Patriarch.

"Hiram Gum!" cried the G. A. R. Man. "My father used often to speak o' him, but he was afore my time. Drowned in the canal."

"Wonderful, wonderful, I've heard tell," exclaimed the Miller. "I can jest remember seein' him oncet 'hen I was a wee bit o' a boy—a leetle man with long hair an' big eyes an' a withered arm."

"Yes, yes," the old man murmured, beating his stick upon the porch. "An' a wonderful fiddler was Hiram Gum. They was few 'round these parts could han'le a bow with that man."

"But Sam Washin'ton's the best fiddler they is," the Loafer interposed emphatically.

"My dear man, Hiram Gum was more'n an earthly fiddler," the Patriarch retorted. "He hed charms. He knowd words."

"I don't b'lieve in them charms further then they 'fect snakes an' bees."

"But Hiram Gum was more'n an ord'nary man, an' I otter know, fer I remember him well. He was leetle, ez the Miller sayd, an' hed long black hair an' a red beard that waved all around his neck, an' big black eyes, an' cheeks that shined like they was scoured. Then his left arm was all withered an' wasn't no use exceptin' that he could crook it up like an' work the long fingers on the fiddle-strings. No one knowd how old Hiram was, no more'n they knowd where he come from 'hen he settled up the walley sixty years ago, fer he never sayd. No one ever dast ask him 'bout sech things, fer he'd jest look black an' say naw-thin', an' give you sech a glance with them big eyes that you felt all creepy. Aside from that he was allus a pleasant, cheery kind of a man, an' talked entertainin', fer he'd traveled a heap.

"Hiram settled in a little lawg house that stood on South Ridge near where Silver's peach orchard is now. Peter Billings's farm joined his lot, an' it wasn't long 'fore the leetle man tuk to strollin' over to see his neighbors of an evenin'. By an' by he seemed to take a considerable shine fer Peter's dotter Susan. First no one thot naw-thin' of it, fer it hairdly seemed likely that ez pretty a girl ez she would care much about sech a dried-up leetle speciment ez Hiram Gum. Besides, fer a long time she'd ben keepin' company with young Jawhn McCullagh, whose father owned 'bout the best piece o' farmin' land up the walley.

He was a big, fine-lookin' felly, a bit o' a boaster, an' with a likin' fer his own way.

"So no one ever dreamt anything 'ud come o' Hiram Gum loafin' over at Billings's. But, boys, 'hen you've lived ez long ez I hev, an' seen ez much o' the worl' ez I hev, you'll come to the conclusion that they is a heap o' truth in the old sayin' that matches is made in Heaven. But it do seem sometim's like they wasn't much time or thot spent in the makin'. Fust thing we heard that Hi hed ben drove off the Billings's place an' Susan was kep' locked in her room fer a week. An' sech a change ez come over that man. It was airy in the spring 'hen it happened. He'd allus met a man with a hearty 'howde' before, but after that he never spoke 'hen he passed. From one o' the pleasantest o' men he become one o' the blackest. From comin' to store every day, he got to comin' only 'hen he needed things. The rest o' the time he spent mopin' up in his placet on the hill. Susan changed too. She lost color an' got solemn like. Many a time I seen her leanin' over the gate, lookin' away up the ridge to where Hiram's placet lay.

"Then come the Lander's big party. It was the last o' the season fer the hot weather was near 'hen they wasn't no time fer swingin' corners, let alone the overheatin' that 'ud come by it, so everybody in the walley was there. Young an' old danced that night. They was three sets in

the settin'-room an' two in the kitchen ; they was two in the entry an' one on the porch. Save fer layin' off at ten o'clock fer sweet-cake an' cider we done wery leetle restin'. They was mighty few wanted to rest much 'hen Hiram Gum played. He'd no sooner tuk his placet in the corner then every inch o' the floor was covered with sets. Bow yer corners ! an' we was off."

The old man beat his stick on the porch and waved his body to and fro.

"My, but that was fiddlin' ! It jest went th'oo a man like one o' them 'lectric shockin' machines. Yer feet was started an' away ye went ; ole Hiram settin' there with his withered arm crooked up to hold the fiddle, the long, crooked fingers flyin' over the strings, the bow goin' so fast ye could hairdly see it, his big black eyes lookin' down inter the instermen', his long hair an' beard wavin' ez he swung to an' fro. Now yer own ! Oh, them was dancin' days 'hen Hi Gum played !

"They never was a more inweterate hat-passer then Hiram, fer be his playin' he made his livin', an' never a note 'ud he make tell they was fifty cents in his ole white beaver. Then he'd play that out an' 'round he'd come agin. That night he didn't ast a cent, but jest sat there glum an' never oncet stopped the music.

"Susan was a wonderful dancer—jest ez quick ez a flash, untirin', an' so light on her feet that ye

felt like ye was holtin' to a fairy 'hen ye swung corners with her. She was on the floor continual'. I done one set with her an' noticed how she could scarce keep her eyes offen Hi. She only danced one set with McCullagh an' lay kind o' limp like in swingin' corners an' didn't say nawthin', so 'hen they finished he left the house. I seen him go out o' the door with a black look in his face.

"Most all hed gone 'hen I left Lander's airy in the mornin'. We lived over the river, an' ez they wasn't no bridge we use to cross in a couple o' ole boats that was kep' tied along the bank jest below the canal lock. I went down over the flat an' th'oo the woods tell I come to the canal, where I crossed the lock an' walked along the towpath, whistlin' all the time fer company. It was a clear night. The moon was shinin' bright th'oo the trees. The canal was on one side o' me, an' th'oo the open places in the bushes on the other I could see the river gleamin' along. I got to the bend jest a couple of hundred yards above where the boats lay an' was jest steppin' out inter the clearin' there 'hen sudden I heard a loud voice. I stopped. Then it come louder, an' I recognized Jawhn McCullagh's rough talk. I went cautious tell I was out o' the woods. There, jest ahead, I seen him, near the path, facin' ole Hiram Gum, who, with his fiddle under his arm, was standin' with his back to the canal, lookin' quiet at the

big felly. I dropped to the ground an' watched, scarce breathin' I was so excited.

"Jawhn raised a heavy stick, an' shook it, an' stepped slow-like toward the leetle fiddler, crowdin' him nearer the bank.

" 'Hiram Gum!' he sayd, 'I've hed 'nough o' you. Git out o' this country an' never come back, or you'll never fiddle agin!'

"Hiram lowered his fiddle an' answered, 'You can't skeer me, Jawhn McCullagh, fer Susan doesn't keer fer you!'

" 'You sha'n't run off with her!' the other yelled, shakin' his stick.

"I could see his face workin' ez he swung his club up an' down an' step be step kep' edgin' the leetle felly nearer the wotter. I jest lay tremblin', I was that frightened, fer I was but a lad in them days. I knowd I otter run out an' stop it, but 'fore I got me couritch up I hear the soft notes o' the fiddle. There was ole Hiram with his withered hand holdin' the instermen', his long fingers flyin' over the strings, the bow slidin' slow like up an' down.

" 'Swing yer corners, Jawhn!' he cried, fixin' them black eyes on the big feller.

"Then the notes come quick an' short. Jawhn's stick dropped, an' his arm fell limp like. He passed one hand confused over his forehead. He bowed. The notes come faster. In another minute he was swingin' corners with his arms grasp-

in' the air. The dead sticks cracked under his feet ez he flung around. An' ez ole Hi called the figgers he followed him, yellin' 'em louder an' kickin' like mad. It was the wildest dancin' ever I seen. He bowed an' twisted, back'ard an' for'a'd, an' chas-sayed an' chained, his feet movin' faster an' faster ez the notes come quicker an' quicker an' the bow slid to an' fro like lightnin'. Ole Hiram kep' movin' 'round cautious like, never takin' his eyes off the dancer tell he was on the river side an' Jawhn skippin' 'round on the beaten tow-path.

"Them was awful minutes fer me. I could do nawthin', fer the playin' kind o' spelled me. 'Hen I seen the fiddler begin to move toward the canal an' the mad dancin' felly backin' nearer an' nearer the bank, I tried to git up but I kicked out with both feet an' fell sprawlin' on the groun'.

"'Back to your corner, Jawhn!' the ole man called.

"'Corners next!' yelled the dancer, kickin' up his heels an' th'owin' out his arms like he was grabbin' somethin'. Then come an awful cry. They was a splash. He'd gone over the bank.

"I jumped out, fer the music hed stopped, an' started toward the spot. But 'fore I got there Hiram hed th'owed away his fiddle an' run to the canal, an' was down on his knees starin' inter the wotter. A head come above the surface.

Then an arm reached wildly out. The ole man bent over an' grasped the hand. But it wasn't no uset, fer he'd nawthin' to support himself with. He took holt o' the bank with his withered fingers, but the arm give 'way an' he toppled over. Fer a minute all was still. I leaned over the wotter an' waited. They was a ripple toward the middle, an' two heads come up. I seen Hiram Gum's long black hair an' beard an' his drawn face ez he looked at the sky overhead. Then they disappeared agin. The surface of the canal become quiet an' still like nawthin' hed ben happenin'. Then I turned an' run.

"I flew along the tow-path, acrosst the clearin', inter the woods agin, an' down toward the river where the boats lay hid among the willer bushes. An' ez I went crashin' th'oo the branches I hear a girl's voice callin'.

" 'Hiram,' she sais, 'why was you fiddlin'? I thot you was never comin'.

"Another second an' I was th'oo the willers an' on the bank. There, settin' in a boat, her hands on the oars ready to pull away, was Susan Billings."

The Patriarch beat his cane softly on the floor and hummed a snatch of a tune.

There came a short, quick puffing as the Loafer drew on his pipe, until the bright coals shone in the darkness.

"But Sam Washin'ton——"

The old man arose slowly.

"I don't keer 'bout Sam Washin'ton. I must be goin' home. I'll git the rhuem'tism on sech a night sure, fer I've no horse-chestnut in me pocket."

CHAPTER XVIII.

The "Good Un."

AN air of gloom pervaded the store. Outside the rain came pattering down. It ran in torrents off the porch roof and across the entrance made a formidable moat, which had been temporarily bridged by an empty soap box. It gathered on the limbs of the leafless trees and poured in steady streams upon the backs of the three forlorn horses, that, shivering under water-logged blankets, stood patiently, with hanging heads, at the hitching rail. Within everything was dry, to be sure, but the firewood, which was damp and would not burn, so the big egg stove sent forth no cheerful rays of heat and light. Out from its heart came the sound of sizzle and splutter as some isolated flame attacked a piece of wet hickory. It seemed to have conveyed its ill-humor to the little group around it.

The Tinsmith arose from the nail keg upon which he had been seated, walked disconsolately to the door and gazed through the begrimed glass

at the dreary village street. He stood there a moment, and then lounged back to the stove.

As he rubbed his hands on the pipe in vain effort to absorb a little heat, he grumbled, "This here rain's upset all my calkerlations. I was goin' to bile to-morrow, but you uns doesn't catch me makin' cider sech a day ez this. My weemen sayd they'd hev the schnitz done up to-day an' we could start the kittles airy in the mornin'. Now all this time is loss."

"Seems like ye're bilin' kind o' late," said the Storekeeper, resting both elbows on the counter and clasping his chin in his hands. "Luther Jimsen was tellin' me the other day how all the folks up the walley hes made."

The storm had kept the Patriarch at home, so the Chronic Loafer had the old man's chair. He leaned back on two legs of it; then twisted his long body to one side so his head rested comfortably against his favorite pile of calicoes.

"Speakin' o' apple butter," he said, "reminds me of a good un I hed on my Missus last week."

"It allser remin's me," interposed the Tinsmith, "that I met Abe Scissors up to preachin' a Sunday, an' he was wond'rin' when you was goin' to return his copper kittle."

"Abe Scissors needn't git worrit 'bout his kittle. I've a good un on him ez well ez on the Missus. His copper kittle——"

The Farmer, who had almost been hidden by

the stove, at this juncture leaned forward in his chair and interrupted, "But Abe Scissors hain't got no kittle. That there——"

"Let him tell his good one," cried the School Teacher. "He's been tryin' it every night this week. Let us get done with it."

The Farmer grunted discontentedly but threw himself back in silence. With marked attention, however, he followed the Loafer's narration.

"The Missus made up her mind she'd bile apple-butter this year, bespite all my objections, an' two weeks ago this comin' Saturday she done it. They ain't no trees on our lot, so I got Jawhn Longnecker to give me six burshel o' Pippins an' York Imper'als mixed, on condition I helped with his thrashin' next month. I give Hiram Thompson that there red shote I'd ben fattenin' fer a bawrel o' cider. She'd cal'lated to put up 'bout fourteen gallon o' butter. I sayd it was all foolersshness, fer I could buy it a heap sight cheaper an' was gittin' tired o' Pennsylvany salve any way. Fer all year round, zulicks is 'bout the best thing to go with bread."

"Mentionin' zulicks," interrupted the Storekeeper, "remin's me that yesterday I got in a bawrel o' the very finest. It's none o' yer common cookin' m'lasses but was made special fer table use."

"I'll bring a tin down an' hev it filled," continued the Loafer, "fer there's nawthin' better'n

plain bread an' zulicks. But the Missus don't see things my way allus, an' they was nawthin' but fer me to borry the Storekeeper's horse an' wagon an' drive over to Abe Scissors's an' git the loan o' his copper kittle an' stirrer."

"But Abe Scissors hain't got no copper kittle," cried the Farmer vehemently.

"He sayd it was his copper kittle an' I didn't ast no questions," the Loafer replied. "My pap allus used to say that 'bout one half the dissypintments an' onhappinesses in this worl' was due to questionin', an' I 'low he was right. So I didn't catechize Abe Scissors. He 'lowed I could hev the kittle jest ez long ez I didn't burn it, fer he claimed he'd give twenty-five dollar fer it at a sale last spring. Hevin' made satisfactory 'rangements fer the apples, the cider, the kittle an' the stirrer, they was nawthin' left to do but bile. Two weeks ago tomorrer we done it.

"The Missus inwited several o' her weemen frien's in the day before to help schnitz, an' I tell you uns, what with talkin' 'bout how many pared apples was needed with so much cider biled down to so much, an' how much sugar an' cinn'mon otter be used fer so many crocks o' butter, them folks hed a great time. 'Hen they finished they was a washtub full o' the finest schnitzed apples ye ever seen."

"Borryed my washtub-still," exclaimed the Tinsmith.

"A gentleman is knowd be the way he lends, my pap use to say," drawled the Loafer, gazing absently at the ceiling.

"Well, ef your father was anything like his son he knowd the truth o' that sayin'," snapped the Tinsmith.

"He use to argy," continued the Loafer, ignoring this remark, "that them ez hesn't the mawral courage to refuse to lend 'hen they don't want to, is allus weak enough to bemoan their good deeds in public. But it ain't no use discussin' them pints. I got everything I needed, an' on the next mornin' the Missus was up airly an' at six o'clock hed the fire goin' in the back yard, with the kittle rigged over it an' hed begin to bile down that bawrel o' cider.

"Bilin' down ain't bad fer they hain't nawthin' to do. It's 'hen ye begins puttin' in the schnitz an' hes to stir ketches ye. I didn't 'low I'd stir. Missus, 'hen the cider was all biled down to a kittle full, sayd I hev ter, but I claimed I'd worked enough gittin' the things. Besides I'd a 'pointment to see Sam Shores, the stage-driver, 'hen he come th'oo here that afternoon. The Missus an' her weemen frien's grumbled, but begin dumpin' the schnitz in with the bilin' cider an' to do their own stirrin'. I come over here an' was waitin' fer the stage. After an' hour I concided I'd run over to the house an' git a drink o' cider. I went in the back way, an' there I seen Ike Lauterbach's

wife a-standin' stirrin'. The rest o' the weemen was in the kitchen.

" 'Hen Mrs. Lauterbach seen me she sais pleasant like, 'I'm so glad you've come. Your wife an' the rest o' the ladies hes made a batch o' cookies. Now you jest stir here a minute an' I'll go git some fer ye.'

"I was kind o' afraid to take holt on that there stirrer, so sayd I'd git 'em meself. But she 'sisted she'd be right out, an' foolish I tuk the han'le. I regret it the minute I done it. I stirred an' stirred, an' Mrs. Lauterbach didn't come. Then I hear the weemen in the house laughin' like they'd die.

"The Missus she puts her head out an' sais, 'Jest you keep on stirrin'. Don't you dast stop fer the butter'll stick to the kittle an' burn it ef ye does.'

"Down went the windy. I was jest that hop-pin' mad I'd a notion to quit right there an' leave the ole thing burn, but then I was afraid Abe Scissors might kerry on ef I did. So I stirred, an' stirred, an' stirred. I tell ye I don't know any work ez mean ez that. Stop movin' the stick an' the kittle burns. Ef any o' you uns ever done it you'll know it ain't no man's work."

"The weemen allus does it with us," said the Miller in a superior tone.

"I cal'lated they was to do it with us, but I mistook," the Loafer continued. "I stirred, an'

stirred, an' stirred. The fire got hotter an' hotter an' hotter, an' ez it got warmer the han'le o' the stirrer seemed to git shorter, an' me face begin to blister. I kep' at it fer an hour an' a half, tell me legs was near givin' way under me, me fingers was stiff an' achin', me arms felt like they'd drop off from pushin' an' twistin' that long stick. The apples was all dissolved but the butter was thin yit, an' I knowd it meant th'ee hours afore we could take the kittle offen the fire.

"Then I yelled fer help. One o' the weemen come out. I was that mad I most swore, but she jest laughed an' poked some more wood on the fire an' sayd ef I didn't push the stick livelier the kittle'd burn. The fire blazed up hotter an' hotter, an' it seemed like me clothes 'ud begin to smoke at any minute. Me arms an' legs was achin' more'n more. Me back was 'most broke from me tryin' to lean 'way from the heat. Me neck was 'most twisted off be me 'temptin' to keep the blaze from blindin' me. It come four o'clock an' I yelled fer help agin.

"The Missus stuck her head outen the windy an' called, 'Don't you let that kittle burn!'

"I was desp'rate, but I kep' stirrin' an' stirrin'. It come sundown an' begin to git darker an' darker, an' the butter got thicker an' thicker, but I knowd be the feel that they was a couple o' hours yit. I begin to think o' lettin' the ole thing drop an' Abe Scissors' kittle burn, fer I held he didn't hev

no business to lend it to me 'hen he knowd well enough it 'ud spoil ef I ever quit stirrin'. Oncet I was fer lettin' go an' slippin' over here to the store, fer I heard several o' the fellys drive up an' hitch an' the door bang shet. But 'hen I tried to drop the stick I jest couldn't. Me fingers seemed to think it wasn't right an' held to the pole, an' me arms kep' on pushin' an' pushin' tho' every motion give me an ache. I jest didn't dast, so kep' stirrin' an' stirrin' an' stirrin', an' thinkin' an' thinkin' an' thinkin', an' wond'rin' who was over here an' what was doin'. An' ez I kep' pushin' an' pushin', an' thinkin' an' thinkin', I clean forgot meself an' all about the apple-butter.

"I come to with a jump fer some un hed me be the beard. 'Hen I looked up I seen the Missus an' her weemen frien's standin' 'round me gestickelatin'. The Missus was wavin' what was left o' the stirrer. It was jest 'bout half ez long ez 'hen I begin with it, fer the cross piece that runs down into the butter an' 'bout half the han'le was burned off. Seems I'd got the ole thing clean outen the kittle an' hed ben stirrin' it 'round the fire."

"Reflex action," suggested the Teacher.

"The butter was fairly smokin'. An' the kittle! Well, say, ef that there wasn't jest ez black on the inside ez ef it was iron 'stead o' copper. An' the weemen! Mebbe it was reflect actin' they done, ez the teacher sais, but whatever it was it skeered

me considerable. But final I seen how funny it was, how the joke was on the Missus who'd loss all her apple-butter, 'stead o' on me, an' how I'd got square with Abe Scissors fer lendin' me his copper kittle 'hen he knowd it 'ud burn ef I ever stopped stirrin'. An' I jest laughed."

The Loafer straightened up in his chair and began to rock violently to and fro and to chuckle.

The Farmer arose and walked around the stove.

"What fer a kittle was that?" he asked in a low, pleasant tone. "Was they a big S stamped on the inside next the rim?"

"That's the one exact. He! he!" cried the Loafer, with great hilarity. "S fer Scissors an'——"

"S stands fer Silver too," yelled the Farmer. "My name's Silver. I lent that kittle to Abe Scissors four weeks ago."

The Loafer gathered himself together and arose from the muddy pool at the foot of the store steps. He gazed ruefully for a moment at the closed door, and seemed undecided whether or not to return to the place from which he had been so unceremoniously ejected. Then the sound of much laughing came to his ears, and he exclaimed, "Well, ef that ain't a good un!"

And he ambled off home to the Missus.

CHAPTER XIX.

Breaking the Ice.

WHEN William Larker irrevocably made up his mind to take Mary Kuchenbach to the great county picnic at Blue Bottle Springs he did not tell his father, as was his custom in most matters. To a straight-laced Dunkard like Herman Larker, the very thought of attendance on such a carousal, with its round dancing and square dancing, would have seemed impiety. Henry Kuchenbach was likewise a member of that strict sect, but he was not quite so narrow in his ideas as his more pious neighbor. Yet to him, also, the suggestion of his daughter being a participant in such frivolity would have met with scant approval.

But William was longing to dance. For many years he had fondly cherished the belief that he was possessed of much inborn ability in that art—a genius compelled to remain dormant, by the narrowness of his family's views. Many a rainy afternoon had he given vent to his desire by swinging corners and *deux-et-deux-ing* about his father's barn-floor, with no other partner than a

sheaf of wheat and no other music than that produced by his own capacious lips.

So one beautiful July day, when, attired in his best, he stepped into his buggy, tapped his sleek mare with the whip and started at a brisk pace toward the Kuchenbach farm, his stern father believed that he was going to the great bush-meeting, twelve miles up the turnpike and was devoutly thankful to see his son growing in piety. William's best was a black frock coat, with short tails, trousers of the same material reaching just below his shoe-tops, a huge derby, once black but now green from long exposure to the elements, and a new pair of shoes well tallowed. As he drove up to the gate of the neighboring farm Mary was waiting for him, looking very buxom and rosy and neat in her plain black dress, the sombreness of which was relieved by a white kerchief at the neck and the gray poke bonnet of her sect. As she took the vacant place beside him in the buggy and the vehicle rattled away, Henry Kuchenbach called after them, "Don't fergit to bring back some o' the good things the brethren sais." And good Mrs. Kuchenbach threw up her hands and exclaimed, "Ain't them a lovely pair?"

"Yais," said her husband grimly, "an' fer six year they've ben keepin' comp'ny an' he ain't yit spoke his mind."

The buggy sped along the road, the rattle of

its wheels, the clatter of the mare's hoofs and the shrill calls of the killdeer skimming over the meadows, being the sole sounds to break the silence of the country.

A mile was gone over. Then the girl said falteringly, "Beel, a'n't it wrong?"

In response William gave his horse a vicious cut with the whip and replied, "It don't seem jest right to fool 'em, but you'll fergit all about it 'hen we git dancin'."

There was silence between them—a silence broken only at rare intervals when one or the other ventured some commonplace remark which would be rewarded with a laconic "Yais" or "Ye don't say."

Up hill and down rattled the buggy, following the crooked road across the valley, over three low wooded ridges, then up the broad meadows that border the river, until at length the grove in which lies Blue Bottle Spring was reached. The festivities had already begun. The outskirts of the wood were filled with vehicles of every description—buggies, buckboards, spring-wagons, omnibuses and ancient phaetons. The horses had been unhitched and tied to trees and fences, and were munching at their midday meal, gnawing the bark from the limbs, snatching at the leaves or kicking at the flies while their masters gave themselves up to the pursuit of pleasure. Having seen his mare comfortably settled at a small

chestnut, William Larker took his lunch basket on one arm and his companion on the other and proceeded eagerly to the inner part of the grove, whence came the sounds of the fiddle and cornet. They passed through the outer circle of elderly women, who were unpacking baskets and tastefully arranging their contents on table-cloths spread on the ground—jars of pickles, cans of fruit, bags of sandwiches, bottles of cold tea, layer cakes of wondrous size and construction, and the scores of other dainties necessary to pass a pleasant day with nature. They went through a second circle of venders of peanuts, lemonade and ice-cream, about whose stands were gathered many elderly men discussing the topics of the day and exchanging greetings.

The young Dunkards had now arrived at the center of interest, the platform, and joined the crowd that was eagerly watching the course of the dance. An orchestra of three pieces, a bass-viol, a violin and a cornet, operated by three men in shirt sleeves, sent forth wheezy strains to the time of which men and women, young and old, gaily swung corners and partners, galloped forward and back, made ladies' chains, winding in and out, then back and bowing, until William Larker and his companion fairly grew dizzy.

The crowd of dancers was a heterogeneous one. There were young men from the neighboring county town, gorgeous in blazers of variegated

colors, and young farmers whose movements were not the less agile for the reason that they wore heavy sombre clothing and high-crowned, broad-brimmed felt hats. There were three particularly forward youths in bicycle attire, and three gay young men from a not far distant city, whose shining silk hats and dancing pumps made them centers of admiration and envy. The women, likewise, went to both extremes. Gaily flowered, airy calico, cashmere and gingham bobbed about among glistening, frigid satins and silks.

"Oh, ain't it grand?" cried Mary Kuchenbach, clasp- ing her hands.

"That's good dancin', I tell ye," replied her companion with enthusiasm.

She had seated herself on a stump, and he was leaning against a tree at her side, both with eyes fixed on the platform.

Now in seemingly inextricable chaos; now in perfectly orderly form, six sets bowing and scrap- ing; now winding into a dazzling mass of silk, calico, high hats, felt hats, flower-covered bon- nets and blazers, then out again went the dancers.

"Good dancin', I should say!" William ex- claimed. "Jest look at them th'ee ceety fellys, with them shiny hats, a-swingin' corners. Now, a'n't they cuttin' it? Next comes 'a-la-man-all.' Watch 'em—them two in the fur set—the way they th'ow their feet—the gal in pink with the felly in short pants an' a stripped coat. Now

back! Thet there is dancin', I tell ye, Mary! 'Gents dozy-dough' next. Thet 'ere felly don't call figgers loud 'nough. There they goes—bad in the rear set—thet's better. See them ceety fellys agin, swingin' partners. Grand chain! Good all 'round—no—there's a break. See thet girl in blue sating—she turned too soon. Thet's better. T'other way—bow yer corners—now yer own. What! so soon? Why, they otter kep' it up."

The music had stopped. The dancers, panting from their exertions, mopping and fanning, left the platform and scattered among the audience.

William Larker's eyes were aglow. His companion, seated upon the stump, gazed curiously, timidly, at the gay crowd about her, while he stood frigidly beside her mentally picturing the pleasure to come. He was to dance to real music with a flesh-and-blood partner after all those years of secret practise with a wheat sheaf in the seclusion of his father's barn. He was to put his arms around Mary Kuchenbach. His feet could hardly keep still when a purely imaginary air floated through his brain and he fancied himself "dozy-doughing" and "goin'-a-visitin'" with the rosy girl at his side.

The man with the bass-viol was rubbing resin on his bow, the violinist was tuning up and the cornetist giving the stops of his instrument the usual preliminary exercise when the floor-master

announced the next dance. One after another the couples sifted from the crowd and clambered on to the platform.

"Two more pair," cried the conductor.

"Come 'long, Mary. Now's our chancet," whispered the young Dunkard to his companion.

"Oh, Beel, really I can't. I never danced in puberlick afore."

"But you kin. It ain't hard. All ye'll hev to do is to keep yer feet a-movin' an' mind the felly thet's callin' figgers."

The girl hesitated.

"One more couple," roared the floor-master.

William was getting excited.

"You can dance with the best of 'em. Come 'long."

"Really now, Beel, jest a minute."

The twang of the fiddle commenced and the cracked, quavering notes of the horn arose above the buzz of conversation.

"Bow yer corners—now yer own," cried the leader.

And the young man sat down on the stump in disgust.

"We'll hev to git in the next," he said. "Why, it's eesy. You see this here's only a plain quadreel. Ye otter see one thet ain't plain—one o' them where they hes sech figgers ez 'first lady on the war-dance,' like they done at the big wed-din' up in Raccoon Walley th'ee year ago. These

is plain. I never danced 'em afore meself, but I've seen 'em do it an' I've ben practisin'. All ye'll hev to do is to mind me."

So the following dance found them on the platform among the first. The girl was trembling, blushing and self-conscious; the young man self-conscious but triumphant and composed.

"Bow yer partners," cried the floor-master when the orchestra had started its scraping.

Down went the gray poke bonnet. Down went the great derby, and a smile of joy overspread the broad face beneath it.

"Swing yer partners!"

The great arms went around the plump form, lifting it from its feet; their owner spun about, carefully replaced his burden on the floor, bowed, smiled and whispered, "Ain't it grand?"

"Corners!"

The young woman in blue satin gave a slight scream that was metamorphosed into a giggle, as she felt herself swung through space in the arms of the muscular person toward whom she had careened. Her partner, one of the city men with silk hats, grinned and whispered in her ear, "Oatcake."

"Leads for'a'd an' back!"

William Larker seized his partner's plump hand and bounded forward, bowing and twisting, his free arm gesticulating in unison with his legs and feet. He was in the thick of the dance now; in it with his

whole heart. Whenever there was any "dozy-doughing" to be done, William did it. If a couple went "visitin'," he was with them. When "ladies in the center" was called, he was there. In every grand chain he turned the wrong way. He gripped the women's hands until they groaned inwardly. He tramped on and crushed the patent leather pumps of a young city man, and in response to a muttered something smiled his unconcern, bolted back to his corner, swung his partner and murmured, "Ain't it grand?" The young women giggled and winked at their acquaintances in the next set; the forward youth in a bicycle suit talked about roadsweepers, and the city man said again, "Oatcake."

But the young Dunkard was unconscious of it all to the end—the end that came most suddenly and broke up the dancing.

"Swing yer partners!" bawled the floor-master.

William Larker obeyed. A ragged bit of the sole of his shoe caught in a crack and over he went, off the high platform, with his partner clasped tight in his arms.

When he recovered his senses he found himself lying by the spring, the center of all eyes. His first glance fell upon Mary, who was seated at his side, weeping heartily, despite the efforts of a large crowd of sympathizing women to allay her fears.

Next his eyes met those of the young woman in blue satin, and he saw her laugh and turn and



speak to the crowd. He thought that he noticed a silk hat and heard the word "Oatcake." And then and there he resolved to return to and never again depart from the quiet ways of his fathers.

William and Mary drove back in the early evening. They had crossed the last ridge and were looking out over the broad valley toward the dark mountain at whose foot lay their homes, when the first word was spoken.

"Beel," said the girl with a sidelong glance, "ain't dancin' dangerous?"

The young man cut the mare with the whip and flushed.

"Yais, kind o'," he replied. "But I'm sorry I drug you off o' the platform like thet."

She covered her mouth with her hand. William just saw the corner of one of her eyes as she looked up at him from under the gray bonnet.

"Oh, I didn't min' thet," she said. "It was jes' lovely tell we hit."

The mare swerved to one side, toward the fence. The driver seized the rein he had dropped and pulled her back into the beaten track. Then the whip fell from his hands, and he stopped and clambered down into the road and recovered it. But when he regained his place in the buggy he wrapped his reins twice around the whip, and the intelligent beast trotted home unguided.

CHAPTER XX.

Two Stay-at-Homes.

"IF wantin' to was doin' an' they weren't no weemen, I'd 'a' ben in Sandyago long ago," said the G. A. R. Man. He rolled a nail-keg close to the stove, seated himself upon it, dipped a handful of crushed tobacco leaves from his coat pocket into his pipe and lighted the odorous weed with a sulphur match. Then he wagged his beard at the assembled company and repeated, "Yes, sir, I'd ben in Sandyago long ago."

"Weemen ain't much on fightin' away from home," observed the Chronic Loafer, biting a cubic inch out of a plug of Agriculturist's Charm which he had borrowed from the man who was sitting next him on the counter. The charm had passed half way around the circle and the remaining cubic inch of it had been restored to its owner, when the veteran, not catching the full intent of the remark, replied: "Yas. They's a heap o' truth in that there. Weemen is sot agin furrin wars. Leastways my weemen is. Now——"

"Do they prefer the domestic kind?" asked the School Teacher.

"Not at all—not at all," said the old soldier. "Ye see, my missus passed th'oo sech terrible times back in '60, 'hen I was bangin' away at the rebels down in the Wilterness, that 'hen this here Spaynish war broke out she sais to me, sais she, 'Ye jest sha'n't go.'

"'Marthy,' sais I, 'I'm a weteran. The Governor o' Pennsylvany hes call fer ten thousand men, an' he don't name me, but he means me jest the same. Be every moral an' jest right, I bein' a weteran am included in that ten thousand.'

"With that I puts on me blues, an' gits down me musket, an' kisses the little ones all 'round, an' starts fer the door. Well, sir, you uns never seen sech a time ez was raised 'hen they see I was off to fight the Spaynyards. Mary Alice, the eldest, jest th'owed her arms 'round my neck an' bust out with tears. The seven others begin to cry, 'Pap, Pap, you'll git shoted.'

"'Children,' I sais, sais I, 'your pap's a weteran an' a experienced soldier. Duty calls an' he obeys.'

"The missus didn't see things that way. She jest gits me be the collar an' sets me down in an armchair, draws me boots, walks off with them an' me musket an' hides 'em. She weren't goin' to hev no foolin' 'round the shanty, she sayd.

"Marthy seemed to think that that there set-

tled it, but she didn't know me, fer all the evenin', ez I set there be the fire so meek-like, I was a-thinkin'. Scenes wasn't to my likin', so I concided I'd jest let on like I hed give up all idee o' fightin' Spaynyards, wait tell the family was asleep an' then vanish.

"At midnight I sets up in bed. The moon was shinin' th'oo the winder, jest half-lightin' the room, so I could move 'round without trippin' over the furnitur'. The missus was a-snorin' gentle like, an' overhead in the attic I could hear a soft sniffin' jest ez a thrasher engine goes 'hen the men has shet down fer dinner. It was the childern asleep. I climbs out over the footboard an' looks 'round fer me boots. There they was, stickin' out under the missus's pillow. Knowin' I couldn't git 'em without wakin' her, I concided to vanish bare-foot. But they was one thing agin this, an' that was that the door was locked an' some un hed took the key. I tried the winder, but that hed ben nailed shet. Then I gits mad—that there kind o' quiet-like mad 'hen ye boils up inside an' hes to keep yer mouth shet. It's the meanest kind o' mad, too. It seemed like they was a smile playin' 'round the missus's face, an' that made me sourer than ever, an' kind o' spurred me on.

"Well, sirs, ez I stood there in the middle o' the room thinkin' what I'd do next an' wonderin' whether I hedn't better jest slip back to bed, me eye ketched sight o' an ole comf'table that filled

a hole in the wall where the daubin' hed fell out from atween the lawgs. That put me in mind o' a scheme that I wasn't long in kerryin' out, fer the hole was pretty good sized an' I'm a small man an' wiry. In less'n no time the comf'table was outen that hole an' I was in it. I stayed in it, too, fer jest ez me head an' arms an' shoulders got out o' doors I felt a sharp prickin' in me side. I pushed back an' a great big splinter jagged me. I tried to go on for'a'd, an' it jagged me agin so bad I 'most yelled. So I stayed right there—one-half outen the house an' the other half een. Seemed like time begin to move awful slow then, an' it 'peared a whole day 'fore the moon went from the top o' the old lone pine tree into Granddaddy's chestnut, which is jest twenty feet. Then me feet an' legs was bakin' over the stove, an' the cold Apryl winds was a-whistlin' down me neck.

"I took to countin' jest to pass time, an' I 'low I must 'a' counted fifteen million afore I heard footsteps up the road. A man come outen the woods an' inter the moonlit clearin', where I could see he was ole Hen Bingle. I whistled. He stopped an' looked. I whistled agin an' called soft like to him. He sneaked up to the gate an' looked agin.

"'Hen, help,' I whispers.

"'Who in the heck is you a-growin' outen the side o' that shanty?' he calls, kind o' hoarse an'

scared. With that he pints a musket at me wery threatenin'.

" 'Hen Bingle!' sais I. 'Don't you dast shoot. It's me an' I want you to pull me out. I'm goin' to war.'

" Then it dawned on him what was up, an' he come over an' looks at me. I seen he hed on his blues, too, an' I knowd ez he hed give his woman the sneak an' was off to fight Spaynyards. He wanted to laugh, but I told him it were no time fer sech foolin', but jest to break off that splinter an' pull me loose.

" Now, Hen's an obligin', patriotic kind o' a feller, an' tho', ez he sayd, he hedn't much time to waste, ez his woman was likely to wake up any minute an' find him gone, he reached up an' broke off the splinter. But I fit the hole so tight I couldn't budge, an' he sayd he'd pull me out. So he gits up on the wall o' the well which was jest below me, an' grabs me be both hands an' drewed. I'd moved about an inch, 'hen he kicked out wild like an' hung to me like a ton o' hay, an' gasped an' groaned. I thought that yank hed disj'inted me all over, an' yells, 'Let go!'

" 'Don't you dast let go!' he sayd, lookin' up at me kind o' agonizin'.

" Then I see that neither me nor Hen Bingle was ever goin' to fight Spaynyards, fer he'd stepped off the wall an' was hangin' down inter the well.

"Splinters! Why, I'd 'a' ruther hed a splinter stickin' in every inch o' my body then ole Hen Bingle's two hundred pound a-drawin' me from my nat'ral height o' five feet six inter a man o' six feet five. That's what it seemed like. He ast how deep me well was, an' 'hen I answered forty foot with fifteen foot o' wotter at the bottom, he sayd he'd never speak to me agin if I let go my holt on him. I sayd I guesst he wouldn't, an' he let out a whoop that brought the missus an' the little ones a-tumblin' outen the house.

"Marthy stared at us a minute. Then she sais, 'Where was you a-goin'?' "

"'To fight Spaynyards,' sais I, sheepish like.

"'An' you, Hen Bingle?' she asts.

"'Same,' gasps Hen.

"'Does your wife know you're out?' sais the missus, stern ez a jedge.

"'No,' sais Hen.

"'Then I've a mind to go over to your placet an' git her,' sais Marthy.

"'It's two miled,' Hen groaned, 'an' I'll be drownded agin you git back. Lemme up now an' I'll go home an' stay there.'

"Marthy turns around quiet like, walks inter the house an' comes out with the family Bible.

"'Hen Bingle,' she sais solemn-like, holdin' the book to his mouth, 'does you promise to tell the whole truth an' nothin' but the truth, an' not to go to war?'

“ Hen didn't waste no time in kissin' that book so loud I could hear an echo of it over along the ridge. I kissed it pretty loud meself, to be sure. The missus lifted Hen outen the well an' he snuck off home. His woman never knowd nawthin' about the trouble tell she met my missus two weeks later, at protracted meetin' over to Pine Swamp church. Ez fer me, but fer that splinter I'd be in Sandyago now.”

CHAPTER XXI.

Eben Huckin's Conversion.

EBEN HUCKIN'S father had been a United Presbyterian and his mother a Methodist. Eben belonged to neither church, a fact which he ascribed to his having been drawn toward both denominations by forces so exactly equal that he had never become affiliated with either. Yet he prided himself on being a man of profound religious convictions. How could it be otherwise with one whose forefathers had for generations sung psalms and slept through two-hour sermons on the hard, uncomfortable benches of the bluest of blue-stockings Presbyterianism or prostrated themselves at the mourners' bench on every opportunity? The austerity of these ancestors afforded him a reason for habitually absenting himself from Sunday services in either of the two temples where his parents had so long and faithfully worshiped. The church-folk in the valley were getting entirely too liberal. He was a conservative.

"'Hen the United Presbyter'ans hes to hev an organ to sing by an' the Methydist's gits to hev in' necktie parties an' dancin', it's time for a blue-stockin' like me to set at home o' Sundays an' dewote himself to readin' Lamentations," he was wont to explain to his cronies at the store.

Holding as he did such puritanical ideas, it is not to be wondered that he viewed with bitter hostility the coming of an Episcopal clergyman to West Salem. He had offered no objection when Samuel Marsden, who owned nearly all the land surrounding the village, married a woman from the city, but when that young autocrat turned the United Presbyterians out of the building where they had worshiped for a century and had an Episcopal minister come from down the river to hold weekly services there, the blood of all the Huckins boiled and Eben felt called upon to protest.

At first these protests took the form of long discourses, delivered on the store porch and touching on the evil of introducing "ceety notions an' new-fandangled idee's" into the spiritual life of the community. They continued in this strain until one fine April day when the sun was shining with sufficient warmth to allow Eben and his cronies to move from the darkness within the store to the old hacked bench without, where they could bask in the cheering rays.

The green shoots on the tall maple by the

hitching rail, the shouts of the boys fishing in the creek below the rumbling mill, the faint "gee haw" of the man who was plowing in the meadow across the stream, the contented clucking of a trio of mother hens, wandering up and down the village street with a score of piping children in their wake—these and a hundred other things told that spring was at hand. After their long winter of imprisonment the shoemaker, the squire and the blacksmith would have been contented to enjoy themselves in silence, but Eben was in one of his talkative moods. That very morning his niece had announced her intention of forsaking the church in which her fathers had worshiped, and becoming an Episcopalian. His cup of woe was overflowing. He had been able to view with complacency such defections in other families. They had afforded him splendid illustrations with which to enliven his discourses on the weakness of the generality of mankind. He had set the Huckins above the generality. It had seemed to him impossible that one could err who boasted the blood of men who had gone to church with the Bible in one hand and a gun in the other. He had always laid particular stress on that point. He was a firm believer in heredity and had long contended that the descendants of those who first settled the valley were blessed with strong characters. Yet one of the blood had become an Episcopalian! And he had met the rector!

"The first I knowd of it was this mornin' at breakfast," said Eben, adjusting his steel-rimmed spectacles that he might look over their tops so sternly as to check any hilarity on the part of his auditors. "Mary sais to me, 'Uncle, I wish you'd spruce up a leetle this afternoon ez the rector's comin'.'"

"'Mary,' sais I, thinkin' I'd cod her jest a leetle, 'a miller runs a mill, a tinner works in tin, a farmer farms, but what in the name of common sense does a rector do?'"

"'I mean the preacher,' she answers.

"'Mary,' I sais, 'ef the parson heard you a callin' him sech new-fandangled names, he'd hev you up before the session.'"

"She was quiet a piece, for she seen I was in a wery sewere turn o' mind. I didn't pay no more attention tell I was jest about gittin' up from the table 'hen she spoke up agin.

"'Uncle,' she sais, 'I hope you won't mind, but that's what we Piscopaleens calls preachers—rectors. Mr. Dawson is a rector.'"

"Well, sirs, I was so took back, I jest set down an' gasped. I thot I was goin' to hev a stroke. Here was one o' my blood, my own brother's dotter, raised on the milk o' Presbyter'anism, fer-gittin' the precepts o' her youth, strayin' out o' the straight an' narrow way an' takin' up with the new-fandangled idees o' the Piscopaleens. An' why? Because she liked the singin'! 'Hen I

heard that I rose in my wrath an' started down here to cool off. On reachin' the apple tree be the bend in the road, I set down on the grassy bank to rest a leetle an' look 'round. Pretty soon I see a man comin' over the medder, an' ez he got close I knowd be the cut o' his coat an' the flatness o' his black slouch that it was the preacher hisself. 'Hen he reached the creek he give a run an' jump an' went flyin' over it in the most ondignifiedest way I ever seen. 'It seems like he thinks he's an angel a'ready an' is spreadin' his wings,' I sais to meself. Then he puts both hands on the top o' the six-rail fence an' waults over it like a circus performer, landin' almost at me feet.

" 'Hello,' he sais.

" 'Hello,' sais I, never liftin' me eyes offen the wheat field acrosst the road.

" 'Fine day,' sais he.

" 'I was jest tryin' to make up me mind whether it was or not,' sais I.

" I thot that 'ud settle him, but I mistook me man. He were the thickest headedest, forwardest felly I ever laid eyes on. He jest laughed. Now I admits that 'hen he laughed he 'peared a tol'able pleasant enough sort o' a leetle person, but I wasn't in no frame o' mind fer jollyin'.

" 'I was jest on me way up to your placet to see ye,' he sais.

" 'Was ye?' I answers. 'Well—I heard ye was comin'. I'm jest on me way to store.'

"It almost seemed I could see that gentle hint comin' outen his one ear after it hed gone in the other.

"'So ye waited here fer me,' sais he. 'How nice of ye! We'll jest stroll down to the wil-lage together.'

"'Well,' sais I, 'I've changed me mind. I'm goin' to stay where I am.'

"'Ye couldn't a picked a nicer placet,' he sais.

"An' with that he set right down be me side. Mad? Why, I was jest bubblin'. An' I hed a right to be, fixed ez I was with a Piscopaleen preacher stickin' to me closer then a burdock burr to a setter dog's tail. I didn't say a word, but jest set there with me eyes on the mo'ntain like he wasn't about.

"By an' by he speaks. 'Mr. Huckin, that's a nice mule you hev runnin' 'round the pasture ad-joinin' our church.'

"'So,' sais I.

"'An' mebbe you wouldn't mind pasturin' him in some other field a Sunday,' he went on. 'Ye mind a few weeks ago I sent you a message askin' that you keep your cattle out o' that field on the Sabbath because they disturbs our service. Ye mind it, don't ye?'

"'Dimly,' I answers.

"'Well,' he went on, 'I guesst it must 'a' ben pretty dim, fer last week ye forgot to take 'em

out an' added that nice mule to the flock. I like that beast mighty well, but I objects to his puttin' his head in the chancery winder durin' the most solemn part of our service, like he done the other day.'

"'Hen I pictured that ole mule attendin' the 'Piscopaleen preachin' I wanted to laugh all over, but I didn't dast fer it 'ud 'a' give him an openin'. I jest turned an' looked at the preacher ez stern ez I could.

"'Perhaps,' I sais, 'these new-fandangled, ceety-fied goin's on o' yourn amused him.'

"He didn't smile then—not a bit of it. He was riled—bad riled, an' pinte his finger at me an' cried, 'See here, you old hardshell.' That was the wery name he called me. 'See here,' he sais. 'Since I've ben a missionary in this community I've tried to conduct meself in a proper an' humble sperrit, but ef I hev to carry my missionary efforts on among the mules, I'll do it with a gun.'

"'Hen I heard that I stood right up an' glared at him. I didn't mind his shootin'. It wasn't that what stirred me up. It wasn't that what made me shake me stick in the air like I was scotchin' a chestnut tree. No, sirs.

"'Mission'ry!' I sais. 'Then all we is heathen,' I sais. 'Parson, folks hev ben singin' sams in this walley fer a hundred an' fifty year. The folks in this walley hes ben contributin' to the support o' mission'ries in furrin lan's fer the last

cent'ry. There are more camp-meetin's, an' bush-meetin's, an' protracted meetin's, an' revivals an' love-feasts in this walley in a year than they are years in your life. Yit you calls yourself a mission'ry. You complains about my cattle disturbin' your meetin's. Ef they enjoy listenin' to your mission'ry efforts in behalf o' we heathen, I don't think I otter stop it. You might do 'em some good.'

"With that I turned an' walked down the road. I never looked 'round tell I come to the edge o' the peach orchard. Then I peeked back over me shoulder. There was the preacher, still standin' be the apple tree lookin' after me. He was smilin'. Mighty souls! Smilin'! I could 'a' choked him."

* * * * *

An oak tree, upturned, its roots stretched forth appealingly in the air, its branches washing helplessly to and fro in the stream, a broken scow lying high upon the beach, bottom up, a great crevasse in the side of the canal through which could be seen an imprisoned and deserted canal-boat, told of the spring flood. The Juniata had fallen again to its natural courses, but it was still turbulent and the current was running strongly. It was fast growing dark. Heavy clouds were rolling along the mountains from the west whence sounded the low grumbling of the coming storm.

Eben Huckin, standing by his boat, looked

anxiously up the river, and then across to where the village had been lost in the fast gathering blackness. By a hard pull to the opposite bank and a run up half a mile of level road he might make the shelter of the mill before the clouds broke. But this meant tremendous exertion and Eben, with the rust of sixty years in his joints, preferred a drenching. So he tucked his basket in the locker in the stern and fixed his oars as deliberately as though the sun were smiling overhead. Then he began to push out into the stream.

The rattle of gravel flying before fast falling feet and a crashing of laurel bushes along the tow-path caused him to pause.

"Hold on there!" came a voice. "Take me over."

A moment later a man emerged from among the trees and came tumbling down the bank. It was Dawson. He stopped short and hesitated when he saw Eben, and was about to turn back when the old man said brusquely, "Git in."

Impelled by a flash of lightning on the mountain side and a crash of thunder overhead, the rector scrambled into the stern of the boat. Eben gave it a shove and climbed in after him. The river had seized the clumsy craft and had swept it far out from the bank before the old man could fix his oars and get it under control. Then with steady strokes he bore away for the other side.

As Dawson sat watching the coming storm and

felt the boat moving along through the water, carrying him nearer and nearer to the lights of the village, he forgot the incident of the mule and the quarrel of the previous day and remembered only that his enemy was taking him from the dark, forbidding mountains behind, where the very trees were thrashing their limbs and straining to and fro as though they would break from their imprisonment and run for shelter too.

"I can never thank you enough for rowing me over, Mr. Huckin," he said.

There was no reply save a vicious creak of the row-locks. The old man paused at the end of the stroke but kept his eyes fixed on the sky overhead. It seemed as if he was about to answer and then thought better of it, for, ignoring his companion completely, he leaned sharply forward, caught the water with the blades and sent a shower splashing over the stern. Dawson was wet through. He was a young man with a temper, and while he could enjoy an intellectual combat with the rough old fellow before him, he had no mind to be under dog in a physical encounter.

"See here, Eben Huckin," he said quietly, but in a voice of determination. "Just handle those oars a little more properly or I'll take command of this craft."

There was another loud rattle of the row-locks, and the rector involuntarily closed his eyes and ducked, thinking to catch the oncoming wave on

the top of his broad hat. The expected deluge did not materialize, and he looked up in surprise to see Eben leaning over the side of the boat grasping wildly at an oar which was now far out of his reach and floating rapidly away.

"Oh, my Gawd!" cried the old man, throwing himself into the bottom of the boat. "We're loss, Parson, we're loss!"

He covered his face with his hands and swung despairingly to and fro, crying, "We're loss—we're loss!"

The boat had turned around and was being swept along stern foremost by the swift current. Dawson saw this, but the peril of their position was not yet clear to him.

"Pardon me," he said quietly, "but I don't understand just what has happened."

"Happened!" cried Eben. "Happened? Why, your talkin' done it. I was listenin' to you, an' an oar got caught in some brushwood an' twisted outen my hand. I jumped fer it, lettin' go o' the other. Now they're both gone."

"But as far as I can see the only difference is we're going in another direction and a great deal faster," said the rector calmly.

"We're just goin' right fer the canal dam," groaned the old man. "It's only four mile straight away, an' 'hen the river's like this here, it's a reg'lar Niagry."

"Hum!" Dawson glanced to his left anx-

iously. The mountains were now lost in the darkness. He looked to the right to see the lights of the village already far up the river.

"Eben," he asked, "is there no way we can steer her into the shore?"

"All the rudders in the worl', ef we had 'em, wouldn't git us outen this current."

"Is there no island we are likely to run into?"

"Nawthin' but Bass Rock, an' ez it's only ten feet square we mowt ez well hope—no, no, it ain't no uset."

"We might swim."

"I can't swim."

"I can—a little. If you could we would get out."

Then the clouds broke and the rain came down in torrents. They were enveloped in blackness and could no longer see one another.

To Dawson, sitting in the stern, his hands grasping the sides of the boat, his head bowed against the storm, it seemed as though they had suddenly been carried out on a great sea. Land was near, but it might as well have been a thousand miles away. A plunge over the side and a few strong strokes might take him to safety. But he could not desert the old man—not till he felt the craft sinking beneath him and the water closing over his head. The boat swung up and down in monotonous cadence, and he felt himself being carried helplessly on and on.

There was a flash of lightning, a deafening crash overhead, and all was dark again. It was but for an instant, and yet he saw clearly, hardly a stone's throw away, a small house on the river bank. A thin wreath of smoke was fighting its way out of the chimney against the rain. In one window there was a light, and in that light a man was standing, complacently smoking a pipe and peering out through the narrow panes and over the river, watching the play of the lightning along the Tuscaroras.

Huckin half rose to his feet.

"It's ole Hen Andrews," he cried. "I wonder ef he seen us."

Thereupon he shouted lustily for help. He continued his unavailing cries for some minutes, and then sank back to his seat.

"Parson," he said, as if by a sudden thought, "Parson, kin you pray?"

"I've been praying all along, Eben," was the quiet reply.

"Mebbe it'll do some good," Eben rejoined, "I hain't never ben much on it meself—not ez much ez I otter 'a' ben, but my pap he was powerful in prayer."

He was silent a moment, and added regretfully, "Oh, don't I wish he was here now!"

"You are not afraid to die, are you?" asked Dawson.

"Most any other way, I'm not," was the an-

swer. "But I don't like drownin', an' I don't make no bones about it. Our family hes allus gone be apoplexy, an' I had an idee I'd go that way, too. All this here comes so sudden. Oh, Parson, it's sech an onrastless, oncertain way o' goin', a-washin' roun' like this fer hours. Ef it 'ud stop after we was gone, I wouldn't min' so much, but to keep on a-washin' an' bobbin' roun' this ole river—Parson, Parson, pray agin."

The old man leaned forward and clasped his companion's hand.

"Pray agin, Parson, pray agin!" he cried.

A flash of lightning lit up the river. Just ahead Dawson saw a broad rock. As they were going they would sweep by it. He sprang forward over the seats until he reached the bow. Then he leaped into the water, still keeping a fast hold with one hand on the side of the boat. A few strong strokes and the clumsy craft turned her head. The swimmer's feet touched the shelving stone, and he reached out blindly till he felt a jagged bit of rock. The stern of the boat swung around and it tugged hard to release itself from the firm grasp that had checked its wild career.

Eben Huckin tumbled into the water. Dawson seized him and dragged him from the river, while the boat, now free, went whirling away down stream.

For a long time the two men lay in silence, face downward, on the stone. Then the storm

went by and the moon came climbing up the other side of the mountain, and by its light they could make out the narrow confines of their refuge. It was hardly ten feet in length and breadth, and was divided down the middle by a crevice. They could see the river whirling on all sides. To their right, over the stretch of water, rose the Tuscaroras; to their other hand they looked into the blackness of the woods which extended from the bank to the ridges miles away.

"Parson, do ye hear that rumblin', that rumblin' jest like the mill in busy times, 'hen all the wheels is goin'?" Huckin was sitting up watching Dawson wring the water from his felt hat. The rector strained his ears.

"That's the dam, Parson. It's jest a piece below here, an' mighty near we come to hearin' that soun' most onpleasant loud. Who'd 'a' thot we'd ever hit this here bit o' rock?"

"Why, Eben, I rather had an idea all along that we might do so," Dawson laughed. "I was watching for it. I had no intention of letting myself get drowned when you heathen in the valley needed a missionary so badly."

"True, Parson, true," said the old man fervently. "It 'ud 'a' ben a hard blow fer the walley to hed you tuk jest at this time."

The rector smiled faintly. He gazed inquiringly at his companion. The moon shining full on Eben's countenance gave him a saintly ap-

pearance, for the rougher features had disappeared in the half-light, and the long white hair and beard, so unkempt in the full glare of day, now framed a benevolent, serious face. Dawson was satisfied.

For a long time nothing passed between the two. Then Eben nudged the rector gently and whispered, "D'ye believe in sperrits?"

"Why, of course not," was the reply.

"Well, I'm glad you don't."

"Why did you ask?"

"Well, I thot ef ye did you'd like to know this here rock is sayd to have a ha'nt."

"To be haunted!" exclaimed Dawson, edging a little closer.

"Yes, be Bill Springle's ghos'. I never put much stock in the story meself, but that's what folks sais. I know them ez claims to hev seen it. I knows one man ez refused to sleep here all night fer a five-dollar bill."

"Goodness me!" said the rector. "I had no idea the people hereabouts were so superstitious."

"It ain't jest superstition, Parson. It's mostly seein' an' believin'. Bill Springle's ben dead these thirty year, an' in that time, they sais, many folks hes seen him."

"Eben, the spirits of the dead have better things to do than to spend their nights sitting on cold, damp rocks."

"I know, Parson, I know; but the case o'

Springle was onusual. He lived back along the other mo'ntain an' one night killed a pedler fer his money. The sheriff's posse chased him clean acrosst the walley to the river, an' here they loss sight o' him. Fer a whole week they beat up an' down the bank an' then give up the chase. A year after they foun' all that was left o' Bill Springle wedged right in that crack ahint me."

Dawson arose to his knees and peered over the prostrate body of his companion into the interesting crevice. Then he fell back to his old place, giving vent, as he did so, to a little laugh.

"He'd starved to death," Eben continued, "an' they sais that sometimes on stormy nights he kin be seen settin' here. I never put much faith in the story meself, ez——"

"I'm glad you don't, Eben," the rector interrupted. "But suppose we talk of something more cheerful."

A long silence followed.

"Parson," the old man at length said, "why don't ye sleep?"

"On this narrow rock? I'd roll into the river."

"I'll watch ye. D'ye see that lone pine tree standin' out o' that charcoal clearin' on top o' the mo'ntain?" Huckin indicated the spot with his hand, and Dawson nodded. "Well, 'hen the moon gits over that tree I'll wake ye up. Then I'll sleep."

The rector replied by rolling over on his back

and watching the stars until his eyes closed. Soon the old man heard a soft, contented purring and he knew that for a time he was alone—at least till Bill Springle joined him. For a long while he sat in deep thought with his eyes fixed on the whirling waters below him. Suddenly he leaned over and peered into the face of the man sleeping at his side.

“Parson,” he said softly, “I guesst ye needn’t mind no more about that mule.”

CHAPTER XXII.

A Piece in the Paper.

THE Chronic Loafer arose from the bench and stepped to the edge of the porch. He rested his left hand on the pillar, thrust his right hand into his pocket and gazed searchingly at the mountains.

"What's keepin' you so quiet to-day?" asked the Teacher, lifting his eyes from the county paper. "One might suppose from the way you was watchin' those mountains, you was expectin' them to come over here so you could go fishin'."

The Loafer turned and looked down on the pedagogue. There was pity in his eyes and disdain lurking about the corners of his mouth.

"Well, you don't feel hurt, do you?" snapped the Teacher.

"I guess you never fished," was the reply.

"To tell the truth I prefer more active pursuits." The learned man said this with the air of one who was in the front rank in the great battle of life. "I prefer doin' things to loungin'

along a creek tryin' to catch a few small trout that never did me any harm."

"I thot you'd never fished much," said the Loafer, letting himself down on the steps and getting out his pipe. "Ef you hed you'd know that half the pleasure of it is gittin' to the stream. You figure on how nice it'll be 'hen you're away from the dusty road, in the woods, lyin' in the grass 'longside of a cool, gurglin' pool, with the trout squabblin' among themselves to git at your bait. You arrive there, an' first thing you set on a rattlesnake. That makes you oneasy fer the rest o' the day. Then you find you've left your bait-can at home an' stirs up some yeller-jackets, ez you are huntin' under rocks fer worms. You lays down your extry hooks where you can find 'em quick, an' then 'hen you need 'em you discovers they're in your foot. No, sir, ef I was wantin' to go fishin' in them mo'ntains, an' I hed the power, I'd tell 'em to git back five mile so I'd hev further to walk to reach the run."

"I hain't got nawthin' agin your idees o' fishin'," said the Patriarch from his place on the bench between the Tinsmith and the G. A. R. Man, "but what you say about expectin' is ridic'lous. You was sayin' a bit ago that you was goin' to hev chicken an' waffles fer supper to-night. You've put in a fine day expectin' it. But ef you goes home an' sets down to sausage an' zulicks, I can see things flyin' 'round your

shanty most amazin'. All the joys o' expectation 'll be wiped outen your mind by dissypintment."

"But you are talkin' o' great expectations, Gran'pap," said the Loafer. "They result in great dissypintments. I've been speakin' o' the leetle things o' life. Now there's the old soldier." He pointed to the veteran. "He was eight year expectin' to git a pension. He talked o' nawthin' else. Ef he'd only git it he'd be happy. Well, he got it, an' he lost the pleasure o' lookin' for'a'd to it. Is he satisfied? No. He's jest put in wouchers claimin' that th'ee new diseases hev cropped out on him an' that he laid the foundations fer 'em in the Wilderness thirty year ago. He wants a raise. He's happy agin, fer he is expectin'."

The G. A. R. Man arose.

"I'm goin' home," he said, "an' I guess I might ez well stop in at your place an' tell your missus to never mind the chicken an' waffles ez you've hed enough fun jest expectin' 'em."

"Well, that would be a good idee," the Loafer drawled. "But you'd better jest yell it to her over the fence. You know she's ben expectin' chicken an' waffles, too."

The veteran dropped back to his place on the bench.

The Patriarch nudged him and said pleasantly, "Why don't you go on?"

"I guesst I'd better wait fer the stage an' git the news," was the growling reply.

"You hain't answered my first question yet," said the Teacher to the Loafer. "You was standin' there half an hour lookin' at them mountains as though they was made of chicken an' waffles. You were thinkin' of somethin'."

"True," the Loafer replied. "I was thinkin' o' Reginal' Deeverox an' Lord Desmon."

"Mighty souls!" the Patriarch cried. "Reginal' Deeverox an' Lord Desmon! You are the greatest man fer makin' acquaintances I ever seen."

"Deeverox was that new segare drummer that come th'oo here yesterday, wasn't he?" the Tinsmith inquired.

"No," the Loafer responded. "He was never a segare drummer ez fur ez I know. He was the real hair to the Earldom of Desmon."

"Desmon! An' where in all nations is Desmon?" the Patriarch exclaimed.

"Englan'," was the calm reply.

"Then I s'pose you was fussin' 'round Englan' last week, 'hen we thot ye was wisitin' your ma's folks in Buzzard Walley," cried the Tinsmith. "Now what air you givin' us?"

"'Hen I told you uns I was wisitin' Mother's folks, I said what was true." The Loafer was undisturbed by the storm he had raised and spoke very slowly, emphasizing his words by a shake of his pipe. "You see it was this 'ay. The man I

was speakin' of was called Lord Desmon, tho' his reg'lar name was Earl o' Desmon. His pap's name was Lord Desmon, too, an' so was his gran'-pap's. Before his gran'pap died, his pap's older brother, that is the uncle o' the man I'm referrin' to, merried a beautiful maid who was workin' about the placet. The old man cast him off an' he went to South Ameriky, leavin' a son who went be the name o' Reginal' Deeverox. Be rights this Deeverox should 'a' hed the property, bein' the hair o' the oldest son. He didn't know it tho', an' his uncle didn't take the trouble to hunt him up 'hen the gran'pap died, but jest settled down on the farm himself."

"What in the name o' common sense is an earl?" asked the Miller. "What does he do?"

"Nawthin'," the Loafer explained. "In Englan' an earl is a descendant o' them ez first cleared the land. He usually hes a good bit o' property an' farms it on the half."

"What gits me is jest how many o' them Lord Desmons they was," the Tinsmith interposed.

"There was the original gran'pap—he's one. Then there was his son that merried the maid an' ought to 'a' ben earl—he is two. Next there was his brother who got the property—he is th'ee. His son makes four, an' Reginal' Deeverox, whose right name was Lord Desmon, is five."

"That there name Lord seemed to run in the family," said the Miller. "I don't wonder they

got mixed. Why didn't they hev a Joe or a Jawhn?"

"Was these here some o' your pap's friends?" asked the Patriarch.

"I only wished he hed 'a' knowd them," the Loafer answered. "I don't think he did tho'. Mebbe he was acquainted with Alice Fairfax, but I never heard him speak o' her an' *The Home an' Fireplace* never mentioned him ez bein' at her castel. I guessed ef Pap hed 'a' been there he would 'a' told me, fer he wasn't much on keepin' things secret."

The Patriarch brought his stick down on the floor with a vigorous bang.

"See here," he cried, "what has got into you anyway? Ef you knows anything about this here Lord Desmon, Reginal' Deeverox, Alice Fairfax business, out with it, I sais. 'Hen you hears a piece o' news ye jest set an' smiles all over it to yourself like ez tho' you was tormentin' us. Ez ef we cared! Let anybody else hev a bit o' news tho' an' you don't give 'em no rest tell you've wormed it out of 'em—not tell you've wormed it all out of 'em."

"Now see here," was the spirited answer, "it ain't jest that I should be accused this 'ay. *The Home an' Fireplace* magazine was layin' 'round the counter a whole week afore I even looked at it. I s'posed you'd all ben readin' it. That's why I thot ye might help me out."

"Shucks! So all this here is nothin' but somethin' you've been readin' in the paper," the Teacher sneered.

"Exact. An' ef you'd read the same piecet I guess you'd ben worrit, too."

"Reginal' Deeverox—Deeverox." The Patriarch was thinking hard and talking to himself. "I don't mind that piecet, an' I read most o' that paper," he said, looking up. "What page was it on?"

"I don't mind the number," the Loafer answered, "but it begins on a page that hes a pictur o' the house o' Miss Annie Milliken in Tootlesbury, Massachusetts, an' a long letter from her sayin' how she hed been bed-rid fer thirty year tell a kind friend recommended Dr. Tarball's Indian Vegetable Pacific."

"Now I do recklect somethin' about that caset," the Tinsmith interposed. "It was a fight over a bit o' property an' a girl."

"Exact," said the Loafer.

"Well, how d' ye know it's so?" the Miller asked. "Because it's in the paper is no sign it's true."

"See here," was the sharp reply, "do you s'pose 'hen they is so much in this world that's true the editor o' *The Home an' Fireplace* 'ud go to the trouble o' makin' up lies to print? Why, it wouldn't pay."

The Miller was about to argue against this

proposition, but the Patriarch leaned over and laid a hand on his knee, checking him.

"Jest wait tell we find out who got the property," the old man said.

"An' the girl," cried the Tinsmith.

"That's jest what I've ben tryin' to find out," said the Loafer. Forthwith he plunged into the history of Reginald Devereux and Lord Desmond. "You see I found the paper on the counter yesterday ez I was waitin' for the mail. I remember now 'most everything that was in that piecet, an' most a mighty puzzlin' piecet it was, too. It begin at a placet called Fairfax Castel, which was the home o' Alice Fairfax, who the paper sayd was most tremendous good-lookin', bein' tall an' willowy, with gold-colored hair an' what it called *p-a-t-r-i-c-i-a-n* cast o' features. She was twenty year old an' hed an income o' ten thousand pound a year."

"Pound o' what?" inquired the Patriarch.

"The paper didn't tell. It jest sayd pound."

"That's the way with them editors," cried the old man. "They allus forgits important points. They expects a man to know everything."

"I guess that them must 'a' ben pound o' somethin' they raised on the place," the Tinsmith suggested.

"That's jest the way I looked at it," the Loafer continued. "It didn't make no difference, anyhow, ez long ez she hed somethin' to live on.

This here Lord Desmon hed a placet near hers an' used to ride over every day regular an' set up with her. He was tall an' hed keen black eyes. Wherever he went he tuk with him a hound he called *M-e-p-h-i-s-t-o* or somethin' like that."

"Now ye mind that he hed no real claim on the Desmon placet an' he knowd it. Before his pap died he hed called him to his bedside an' sayd to him, 'Beware of a man with an eagle tattooed on his right arm. He's the real hair.' So Lord re'lized that he was livin' on a farm that belonged to the son o' his pap's brother. He knowd that afore his uncle died he'd sent word home that his son an' hair could be told be the eagle. Of course the warnin' made Lord kind o' oneasy at first, but ez the years went by an' he heard nawthin' o' his cousin he concided that the ole man hed jest ben th'owin' a scare inter him. Meantime he'd ben doin' wery well with Alice Fairfax, an' things was all goin' his way. Then a strange artist come th'oo the walley. He was paintin'——"

The Patriarch interrupted with a hilarious chuckle.

"Now, boys, look out," he cried. "They never yit was a painter that wasn't catchin' with the weemen. Ye mind Bill Spiegelsole's widdy an' how she'd fixed it up to merry Joe Dumple? She hired a regular painter to come out from town to put a new coat on the house, an' he made him-

self so all-fired handy 'round the placet mendin' stove-pipes, puttin' in glass an' slickin' up the furnitur' she took him afore Joe got there."

"This here artist wasn't one o' that kind," the Loafer said. "He made them regular hand-paint-in's they hangs in parlors, an' done a leetle in the way o' portrates. He put up at the tavern an' then started out fer a stroll th'oo the Fairfax placet. He hed jest entered the park, the paper sayd, 'hen——"

"The what?" asked the Miller.

"The park. Don't ye know, one o' them places fixed up special fer walkin' in, with benches, an' brick pavements, a fountain, an' flower-beds an' a crowket set. Hain't ye never seen the one at Horrisburg?"

"Oh, one o' them!" the Miller said. "Well, I guesst those must 'a' ben pound o' gold Alice Fairfax got a year."

The Loafer resumed the narrative.

"Ez the artist walked along th'oo the park he heard a scream, follered be a beautiful girl who run down the road pursued be a ferocious dog. The paper sayd the great hound was in the act o' leapin' at her to catch her be the neck 'hen the stranger run for'a'd an' grabbin' the brute be the th'oot throttled the life outen him. The anymal's fiery breath, the paper sayd, was blowin' in the artist's face 'hen his hands closed on the furry neck. It was a mighty chose shave, I should

judge. A minute later Lord Desmon run up all out o' wind. The dead beast was his *M-e-p-h-i-s-t-o*. He thot a heap o' the hound, an' the paper sayd that 'hen he looked on the still quiverin' body of his dead companion he swore to be *a-v-e-n-g-e-d*. An' ez he looked up at the stranger that young man knowd Lord hed it in fer him.

"Alice Fairfax couldn't thank the artist enough, an' nawthin' 'ud do but he must come up to her house an' meet her pap. 'Hen the ole man hear the story he wouldn't hev it any other way but that the stranger must stop with them. The paper sayd that he quickly pushed a button——"

"He done what?" cried the Patriarch.

"He pushed a button an'——"

"Pushed a button! Well, mighty souls!" the G. A. R. Man exclaimed. "What a fool thing to do."

"He pushed a button an' one o' the hands appeared. This felly's name was Butler an' he was employed jest a purpose to do chores 'round the house. The ole man give him orders to hev Reginal' Deeverox's—that was the artist's name—trunk brought up from the tavern an' put in the spare room."

"I ain't got it clear yit," the Miller interposed. "Ef ole man Fairfax pushed one o' his own waistcoat buttons how in the name o' all the prophets 'ud Butler feel it?"

"Don't ye s'pose he might 'a' pushed one o' Butler's waistcoat buttons?" replied the Loafer.

"That's a pint o' no importance. The main thing is that Deeverox put up at Fairfax's an' from that day things went wrong with Lord.

"Reginal' was a wonderful good-lookin' chap. He was six-foot tall an' wery soople. He'd long, curly hair that flowed over his shoulders like a golden shower, ez the editor put it. His bearings was free an' noble. Now Lord was no slouch either, an' with his money he was pretty hard fer a poor painter to beat, yit——"

"Joe Dumble hed th'ee hundred a year an' a fifty-acre farm," the Patriarch cried, "but choosin' between him an' the painter, Bill Spiegelsole's widdy tuk——"

"I've told ye afore that this here Deeverox was a portrate painter, an' ye can't settle this question be referrin' to the Spiegelsoles any way. Ez I was sayin', Reginal' hed no money but he hed a brilliant mind. His face was like an open book, the paper sayd——"

"That's rather pecul'ar." It was the veteran who broke into the story this time. "There's Jerry Sprout, who lives beyant Sloshe's Mills, he hes a head jest the shape of a fam'ly Bible, but ye can shoot me ef I can see how a man could hev a face like an——"

"Open book," the Loafer said. "Well, you hev no 'magination. But ef ye don't believe what I'm tellin', you can go git the paper an' read it yourself."

"Come, come; no argyin'." The Patriarch was in his soothing mood. "What become o' Lord?"

"Lord hated Reginal' with a bitter hatred, the paper sayd, because of the death of *M-e-p-h-i-s-t-o*, an' now, ez Alice Fairfax begin to look not on-kindly on the handsome stranger, his cup was more embittered an' he wowed revenge. Things kept gittin' hotter an' hotter 'round the castel. Ole man Fairfax was tickled to death with Reginal' an' 'sisted on him stayin' all summer. Lord come over regular every day, spyin' 'round an' settin' up with Alice 'hen he'd git a chancet. Time an' agin, the paper sayd, he asted her to be his own, but she spurned him. The last time he asted her was at a huntin' party they hed at the castel. Everybody in the county was there—Lord Mussex, Duke Dumford, Earl Minnows, Lady Montezgewy an' a lot of others—all over to hunt."

"Hunt what?" asked the Miller.

"Well, I s'pose they would be likely to drive five or six mile over to Fairfax's to hunt eggs—wouldn't they?" roared the Loafer. "Hunt what? Mighty souls! What would they hunt? Foxes, of course. The whole party started off after the hounds, Alice Fairfax an' Lord Desmon leadin' with——"

"Hol' on!" cried the Patriarch. "Did you say weemen an' all, a-huntin' foxes? That

Englan' must be a strange placet. Why, it ain't safe to trust a woman with a gun. Oh, what a pictur! S'pose we was to go huntin' that 'ay with our weemen." The old man leaned back and shook. "Pictur it! Jest pictur it! Why, they 'ud be blowed afore they got to the top o' the first ridge."

"An' we'd hev to spend most of our time lettin' the bars up an' down so they could git th'oo the fences," the Tinsmith said.

"Well, the weemen over there was along—least that's what the article sayd," the Loafer continued. "They got track o' a fox an' final caught him in a lonely bit o' woods. They give his tail to Lady Montezgwy, who——"

"She couldn't 'a' made much of a hat outen jest the tail," said the G. A. R. Man.

"Well, the article doesn't explain much about that. It sais while these things is occurin' we will take the reader to another part o' the fiel' where Lord Desmon kneels at the feet of Alice Fairfax. The paper sais she sais, 'I loves another.' 'What,' sais he, the paper sais, springin' to his feet an' makin' a movement ez tho' graspin' an unseen foe. 'What,' he sais, 'that low painter varlet!' Jest then, the paper sais, the bushes was pushed aside an' forth jumped Reginal Deeverox. 'You here, Miss Fairfax?' he sais, the paper sais. 'I've hunted fer ye fur an' near.' In his eagerness to reach her side a twig cot his coat-

sleeve an' tore it wide open. The paper sais ez Lord Desmon looked upon the splendid figure of his rival he seen there on his arm—What? the paper sais. An eagle!"

"Now, watch for a good ole wrastle," cried the Patriarch.

"You're wrong, Gran'pap," said the Loafer. "They didn't dast fight afore a lady. Instead Lord jest ground his teeth. The paper sayd he knowd that the lost hair o' the broad acres o' the Desmons hed come to claim his own."

The Miller's clay pipe fell to the floor and shattered into a hundred pieces.

"Well, I'll swan!" he exclaimed. "Why, this here artist was one o' them Desmon boys ye was speakin' of first off, wasn't he?"

"What happened next?" inquired the Teacher.

"The article didn't tell," the Loafer replied. "It cut right off there an' carried the reader back to Fairfax Castel. It was evenin' an' they was hevin' a hunt ball."

"A hunt what?" The Patriarch leaned forward with his hand to his ear.

"A hunt ball—a dance," the pedagogue explained. "Over there after huntin' they always have a dance."

"Mighty souls! but them English does enjoy themselves," the old man murmured. "Goes huntin' all day—takes the weemen along leavin' no one behind to look after the place—then hes

a dance after they gits back. Now 'hen I hunted foxes I was allus so low down tired an' scratched up be the briars agin I got home, I was satisfied to draw me boots, rub some linnymment on me shins an' go to bed. But go on. I guesst the paper's right."

"That night, walkin' up an' down the terrace, Reginal' Deeverox told Alice Fairfax the secret o' his life, the article sayd, how he was Lord Desmon an' how the other Lord Desmon was livin' on stolen property. He ast her to hev him, an' ez she didn't say nawthin' he jest clasped her to his boosum, the paper sayd. All this time Lord hed ben watchin' from behind a statute. 'Hen the girl run away to tell her pap about it, Lord stepped out an' faced Reginal'.

"He sayd, 'One of us must die.' With that he caught Deeverox be the th'oat an' tried to push him off the terrace. They was a clean drop o' fifty foot there, with runnin' water at the bottom. Reginal' was quick an' grabbed his foe 'round the waist. Back'ard an' for'a'd they writhed, the paper sayd, twistin' an' cursin'. Now they was on the edge o' the precipice, an' Alice Fairfax, runnin' to meet her loved one, ez the article explained, seen dimly outlined in the glare o' the castel lights the black figures o' the cousins ez they' fought o'er the terrace of death. She was spelled. Sudden the one Desmon hurled the other Desmon from him. They was an awful cry

ez the black thing toppled over the edge, the paper sayd."

The Loafer put his hand in his coat-pocket and brought it forth full of crushed tobacco leaves, with which he filled his pipe. Then he lighted a match and began smoking.

"Well?" cried the men on the bench in unison.

"Well?" repeated the Loafer.

"Which Desmon was it?" asked the Tinsmith.

"That's jest where I'm stumped," was the reply. "That's jest what's ben puzzlin' me, too. Ye see that page hed ben tore out an'——"

"Mighty souls!" gasped the Patriarch.

"Did ye look fer it?" asked the Miller, rising and moving toward the door.

"Well of course I looked. D'ye s'pose I ain't ez anxious ez you to know which Desmon was kilt?"

"What does you mean be gittin' us anxious," yelled the old man. "Why don't ye keep your troubles to yourself 'stead o' unloadin' em on other folks?"

"Don't blame me that 'ay," said the Loafer. "I done the best I could. I looked all over the store fer that page. I didn't git no sleep last night jest from thinkin' what become of it. Now I mind that last Soturday I seen a felly from Raccoon Walley carry it off wrapped 'round a pound o' sugar. I done the best I could fer ye."

The Teacher arose and walked to the end of the porch. Here he wheeled about and faced the company, stretching his legs wide apart, throwing out his chest and snapping his suspenders with his thumbs.

"You should never begin a story if you can't tell it to the end," he said. "I might as well teach my scholars how to add only half down a column of figures."

"Yes," said the Patriarch, "I would like to know most a mighty well which o' them Desmon boys was kilt. But I'm too ole to chase a pound o' sugar nine mile to Raccoon Walley to find out. They are terrible things, these struggles caused be onrastless human passions. This here petickler story is all the more terrible because them boys was cousins. While we do all feel a bit put out at not knowin' which of 'em licked, we've at least learned somethin' 'bout how they lives in Englan'. An' it should teach us a lesson o' thankfulness that we was born an' raised in a walley where folks is sensible—that is most of 'em."

